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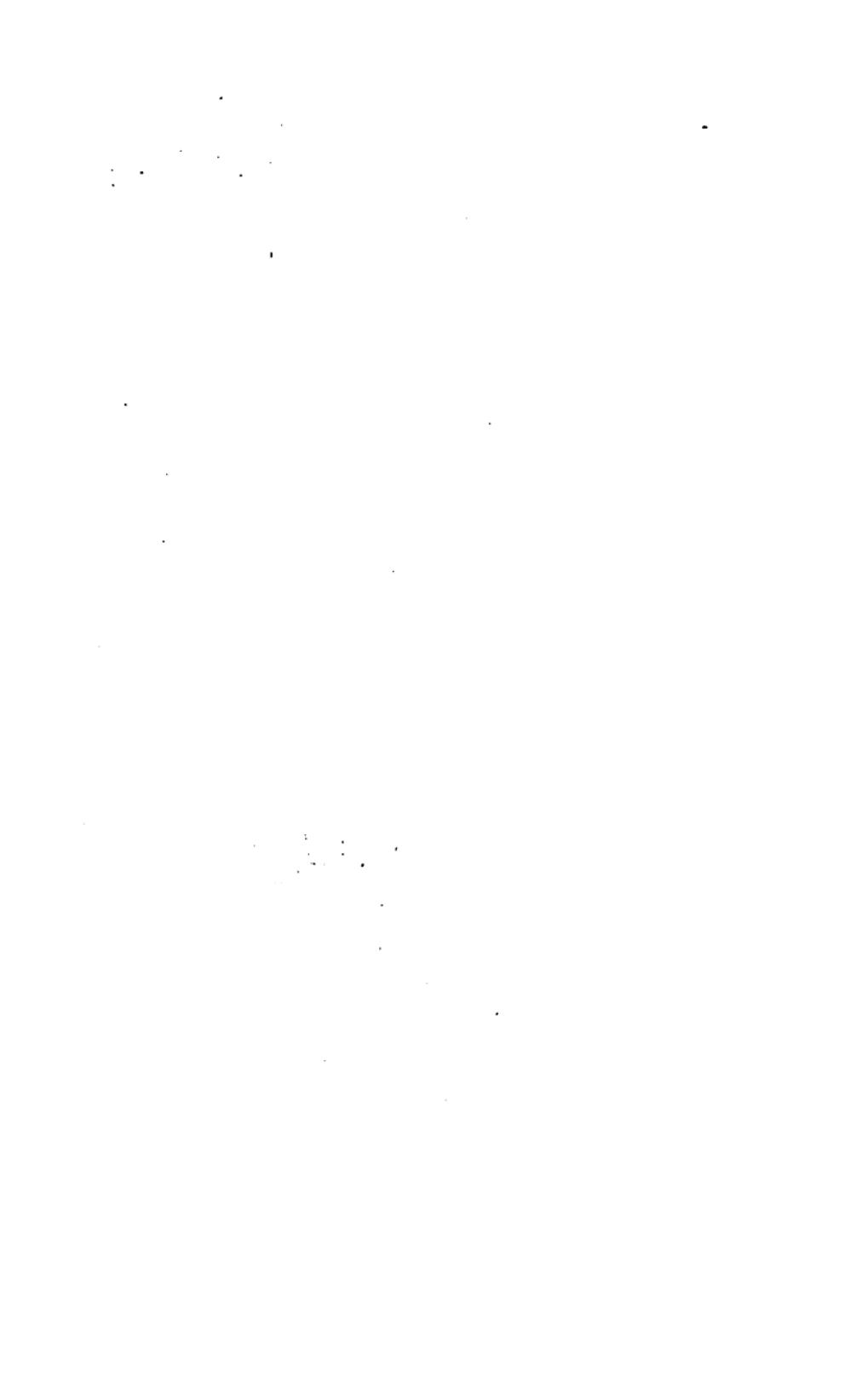




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HOME SUNDAYS.



Kome Sundays;

OR,

Help and Consolation from the Sanctuary.

BY THE

REV. GEORGE EVERARD, M.A.

VICAR OF FRAMSDEN, SUFFOLK.

Author of "Day by Day," "Not Your Own," etc.



LONDON:

WILLIAM HUNT AND COMPANY,
HOLLES STREET, CAVENDISH SQUARE.

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Introduction.

To walk with God and to please Him more and more, to abide in fellowship with His Son, and to abound in the fruits of righteousness, must be the daily aim of every true-hearted Christian. But to do this requires continual, painstaking effort, the use of all available means of grace, and waiting perpetually on the Lord for the promised help of His free Spirit.

If you would thus live and walk, remember that every moment you need help from Christ, that Christ has just the help suited to your necessity, and that He exceedingly delights to bestow it upon you.

Remember to take care that the heart is right. It is the mainspring of all worship and all obedience. Out of it are the issues of life and death. Let the heart be warm with love to the Saviour, and desirous of greater likeness to Him, and there cannot fail to be seen in the life some-

thing of His holiness, something of His meek and lowly spirit.

Remember to bring religion into every thing you do. Not one single word or action of the day ought to be considered outside the sphere of its influence. It has been my aim to set this forth in a previous work, "Day by Day," and it cannot be too much pressed upon the consciences of those who profess to be the Lord's followers. To practise daily self-denial in little things, to aim at improving the least opportunities of benefiting the weakest of the flock, never to reckon there is a moment when we are free from the solemn responsibility of glorifying God in our body and in our spirit which are His, this is a blessed privilege no less than our bounden duty.

Remember that in all your failures in doing this, in all the discouragements you meet with from a backsliding spirit, from the power of sin within and of the Tempter and the world without, it is your strength to fall back on foundation principles. You may ever look for a fresh grant of pardon through the death of your Surety; you may ever look for a fresh measure of the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit.

Remember to trace the hand of God in trials of every description. Whatever be the instrument, *be quite sure* that God hath appointed the trial, and that it is in kindness and faithfulness to draw you nearer to Himself.

Remember that *the least of Christ* gives more true and abiding happiness than the *most of the world*, and when the choice lies between them choose Christ in preference to all beside.

Remember to make the most of each returning Sabbath. The Sabbath day is our Father's gift of love to fill our souls with the breath of His Spirit, and thus to speed us on our voyage across the waves of this troublesome world. For this purpose should we rejoice to frequent the courts of the Lord, and join in hearty worship with His people. Never ought there to be a "Home Sunday" except in cases of real necessity. But there are many who have no option. However much they might desire it they cannot possibly take their place with the assembled congregation. For such especially the following pages have been written.

They are suited for invalids, for those watching by the sick, and for those detained at home by

family duties. There are others too in delicate health, who are unable, when the weather is rough or the distance is long, to be present in the House of God, and who may welcome some assistance in the study of God's Word. The voyager across the wide ocean, and possibly some of our fellow-countrymen sojourning in other lands, and who possess not the same Christian privileges which we enjoy at home, may here find words of guidance and consolation.

The subjects chosen are plain and practical, and dwell chiefly on the leading truths of our most holy faith. The more these are understood and received into the heart, the more will persons find peace in days of trial and be fruitful in every good work.

If subjects of controversy have here and there been slightly touched, it is because the writer feels deeply the perils to which men's souls are exposed through the errors that now unhappily so widely prevail. In a practical work like the present he would have preferred altogether to omit such topics, but at the present day he dare not do so; he trusts however that whatever has been written has been in charity and love, and that not one word will

be found needlessly to wound those that may hold opinions differing from his own.

The various seasons of the Christian year have not been forgotten, and without difficulty the chapter may be found which is suitable to each one of them.

Let me add a needful caution. Never let this or any other book take the place of that Word which is "given by inspiration of God," and is all of it, from cover to cover, "as silver purified seven times in the fire." There is doubtless a danger in the multiplication of religious books, for they become positively injurious if they stand in the way of a diligent, prayerful study of the pure Word. The best that a work like this can hope to accomplish is to lead its readers more to value and better to understand the precious truths of that Word, and to apply more in detail its precepts, promises, doctrines, and narratives, to their own present necessities.

I would commend to the blessing of our gracious Father this attempt to minister to the spiritual welfare of Christ's flock; and may I earnestly request each reader, whilst perusing any portion of this work, to add much fervent prayer for the effectual

teaching of the Holy Ghost, and also to join with the writer in asking the same grace from above on behalf of every one into whose hands a copy of it may fall.

“O Almighty God, who hast built Thy Church upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the head Corner-stone ; grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their doctrine, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable unto Thee ; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

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HOME SUNDAYS.

I.

God's Love Manifested in the Law.

Hear, O Israel : the Lord our God is one Lord : and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.—DEUT. vi. 4, 5.

It is a pleasant thing for a child to discover in some way that he had not anticipated a fresh evidence of a parent's deep affection. To the prayerful student of Holy Scripture not seldom will there be revealed therein, from time to time, glimpses of the love of our Father in heaven, and that often in an unlooked-for way. We shall find it so in the law revealed from Sinai. For what is the substance of that law, and its chief command? Is it not love—love to our God, our Creator, our Benefactor? And is not love the highest happiness of man? Where the

object is worthy of our affection, is it not the spring of the highest, truest, purest joy that lingers in our sorrow-stricken world? What consolation is found in the kindness, in the tenderness of kindred, in the bond that links friend to friend, parent with child, husband with wife! If in family relationships God multiplies our sorrows, he also multiplies our joys. If a man hath no heart to love, he is a wretched, miserable being, though he might call a world his own.

Yet in creature-love there lacks at least one element of rest; it cannot always abide. He who loves the most will probably one day be the most deeply wounded. When Abraham went forth to sacrifice Isaac, the fearful blow must have fallen tenfold heavier because of the deep love that he bare to him. So we need to set our highest love on One of whom not even death itself can rob us. And it is to this we are invited in the command given.

God proposes as the object of our supreme affection Himself the fountain of bliss, Himself the source of all the love that is found on earth, Himself the faithful God that liveth and abideth for ever. Thus doth He manifest His

love in bidding us do that which tends to our highest happiness, for he who hath learnt to love God hath begun to taste on earth the joy of heaven.

But in another respect we see God's love in this command. *Only love seeks love.* Only one who loves you cares to have your love in return. Yea, and in proportion as any one loves you, the more of your affection doth he desire. A father that cares but little for his children would not much regard it though a stranger were to come in and eclipse their love to him ; but if a parent's tenderest thoughts and affections centre around one of his offspring, how deeply will he be hurt by the very least indifference or coldness of feeling. Now it seems indeed surprising that the Creator, the Fountain of light and love, should ask for the feeble taper of human love, yet what doth it tell of His feeling toward us ? It is written, "the Lord thy God is a jealous God." So again : "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." What a revelation of love is here ! What saith it but this : "I am jealous of your affection ; I would have you love Me preeminently, with all your heart and soul and might, because it is thus

that I feel towards you, because with all *my* heart and soul and might do I love you."?

Consider also that *only love merits love*. Only a God of love could reasonably ask our love. Were Jehovah such as some have imagined,—a mighty Being who once created mankind, but now so distant, so far from this earth of ours, that He thinketh not of us or careth for us,—He might justly demand obedience and service, for this by our creation we should owe to Him: but how could He ask our love? Surely He requireth nothing beyond that which is right; therefore, in demanding our love, doth He not proclaim His own?

And whilst He thus reminded Israel of old of their duty towards Him, He gave them evident proofs of the justice of the claim. He set before them what He had wrought, and what He would yet work on their behalf. He had delivered them from a cruel bondage, He would yet bring them into a land flowing with milk and honey.

And by what He hath performed already, and by what He hath promised to us, may we also perceive the exceeding greatness of His love to us. How much hath He wrought in the perfected atonement and the glorious resurrection of Christ,

as likewise in all His gracious dealings with His Church from the beginning ; how exceeding great and precious are those promises of mercy, grace, help, peace, sanctification, and glory, which are given to us in the Word of truth.

Oh, doubting one, bathe thy soul in the ocean-depths of God's love. Read it in the law, read it in the Gospel : read it in every precept, and in every promise. Be afraid to grieve, by your unbelief, Him whose loving kindness so far surpasses all your thoughts !

But whilst we delight to find in this command fresh evidences of God's love, let us not fail to mark how high and comprehensive is the standard of duty which it sets before us.

It shows clearly that a religion of mere outward service will not be accepted. Whatever value it may possess as beneficial to others in the example which it affords, it lacks the chief element which God regards. "This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth, and honoureth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me ; but in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case

enter into the kingdom of heaven." "My son, give Me thy heart." "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." Within the compass of the second commandment do we find clearly laid down the principle—that of love—by which alone obedience to any command can be pleasing in the sight of God: "shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep my commandments." Without the heart given to God, without true love and zeal, without an earnest following after His precepts, you possess no religion which is worthy of the name.

And learn too that God will have the first place in our hearts. When Christ taught His disciples that if any man hated not father or mother, husband or wife or child for His sake, he could not be one of His flock, in a very forcible way He was putting this truth before them. Of course He never meant that natural affection was to be quenched, to do this is to sin both against the law and the Gospel; could they but see it, many a one in forsaking the ties of kindred for some monastery or sisterhood is acting in direct opposition to the will of God. But Christ would have men know that He would be King; that if another, though the dearest on earth, would draw them

away from their allegiance to Him, they must act toward them even as though they hated them ; yea, even if need be, they must part with them for ever.

A lad was brought before a native magistrate in India on account of his desiring to embrace Christianity. He was asked why he desired this. He replied that He longed for salvation which he could not find in his old religion ; Sudras and Brahmins alike would perish unless they believed in Christ. His mother then appealed to him by all that she had done for him not to bring disgrace upon his family, or to grieve her by being baptized. He made a short and beautiful answer, exactly illustrating the meaning of our Lord's command : "God first," said he, "mother second." It must be so. God Himself must be first, all else must stand second. Kindred, ease, comfort, worldly interests, our favourite pursuits, yea, even our plans for doing good, and our work in the Lord's vineyard, must not be permitted to be our chief delight. We must rise above all to find our joy, our satisfaction in God Himself.

Hence we see our need for the perpetual aid of the Holy Spirit. Men naturally have no love to a just and holy God, still less do they love Him

with all their heart. "The carnal mind is enmity against God." This enmity takes various shapes. Sometimes it is manifested in trying to discover contradictions in God's Word; sometimes in a course of open disobedience to His commands; sometimes in a life of utter disregard of all religious duties; sometimes in striving to put the Creator out of sight, and to live as if there were no God; sometimes in a form of godliness, whilst the inner spirit of it is wholly ignored. But in every case there needs the mighty power of the Holy Ghost at first to kindle, and then to cherish, the sacred flame of Divine love. Oh, plead for this!—

Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire,
And lighten with celestial fire.
Thou the anointing Spirit art,
Who dost thy seven-fold gifts impart.

Thy blessed Unction from above
Is comfort, life, and fire of love.
Enable with perpetual light
The dulness of our blinded sight.

In the light of this command let us learn also our need of a better righteousness than our own. Surely it makes plain the impossibility of any self-justification before God. It cuts away the

ground beneath every self-righteous hope. For tell me, reader, what moment in what hour of your life did you ever love God perfectly, "with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might"? Where then do you stand? In spite of any partial fulfilment of duty in other respects, you have been every moment a transgressor of God's holy law, yea, and of the chiefest command of that law; you have every moment come short of the glory of God. How then can you regard anything that you may have been or done as your confidence before your Judge?

Suppose we grant for a moment that you have perfectly fulfilled your duty to your fellow man, that you have never injured any one, that you have loved your neighbour as yourself, that you have incessantly been striving to promote the welfare of others, though in this also you must acknowledge that you have greatly failed; yet *will obedience to the second great command atone for the breach of the first?* Will love to the creature make amends for want of love to the Creator? You cannot believe it for a moment. Yea, rather, in that you have a heart capable of loving your fellow man, do you not condemn yourself the more for not loving the Great and the

Good One? Hesitate not then to take your right position—a bankrupt in heaven's court with a debt beyond all power of calculation, and no assets, nothing whatsoever to lessen the fearful score.

When thus you come before God, He reveals to you at once the righteousness which He hath provided. What you have not in yourself, you have abundantly in Christ. Unloving though you have been, He freely forgives and accepts you through the merits of the Redeemer. He perfectly justifies you, and clothes you with the best robe; and then by His Holy Spirit He disposes your heart to love Him and walk in His ways. Ever remember the difference between God's way and man's way of justification. Man saith—"I must love God, and then He will forgive and love me." God saith—"I am willing to forgive you now, though you have not loved Me; then by my Spirit I will pour out my love into your heart." Study Rom. v. 1—5. First we have justification by faith in Christ, then follows a chain of blessed consequences:—peace with God, access into His favour, rejoicing in hope, glorying in tribulations; and one of the most precious,—the love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost.

Blessed are they that know by experience the truth here taught. Blessed are they that know what it is, in the midst of all unworthiness, to be justified in Christ, and henceforth to love Him who hath first loved them.

"O God, who hast prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man's understanding: pour into our hearts such love toward Thee, that we loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

We cannot always trace the way,
Where Thou, our gracious Lord, dost move,
But we can always surely say
That Thou art love.

When mystery shrouds our darken'd path,
We'll check our dread, our doubts reprove;
In this our soul sweet comfort hath,
That Thou art love.

Yes! Thou art love: a truth like this
Can every gloomy thought remove,
And turn all tears, all woe to bliss;—
Our God is love.

II.

The True Light.

I am the light of the world ; he that followeth me shall not abide in darkness, but shall have the light of life.—JOHN viii. 12.

It is not an uncommon thing in changeable weather to notice the sky overcast with black clouds, but as we have looked upon it the glorious sun bursts forth in his might, and within a little all around is once more basking in his beams, whilst scarcely a trace remains of the dark shadows which but lately had covered the earth with gloom. Even thus is it with our world as we now behold it, and as it shall be by and by. Meanwhile there is light shining through the darkness, and in the case of all who welcome it, the light shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

But what are these dark clouds that cast such deep shadows over our earth ?

There is the most appalling ignorance. The God of this world hath blinded men's eyes that

they see nothing aright. In far off lands men have changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like unto corruptible man and to four-footed beasts. The Great Spirit that is dimly seen is not a God of love but one whom the worshipper regards only with an awful dread. And even in lands favoured like our own, what fearful ignorance exists as to the most necessary truths. How few have the least conception of the fallen state of man, of the demands of the law, of the impossibility of an entrance into the kingdom without a thorough renewal of heart, of the way by which sin can be forgiven, of the solemn importance of an eternal state, of the true character of the God we worship!

There is again sin, sin everywhere. It defiles the mansions of the great, it is found producing its bitter fruits within the homes of the poorest. It breaks up the peace of families; it brings poverty where there might be plenty; it creates jealousies, heart burnings, strifes, secret sorrows and anxieties that no tongue can describe. It weighs upon the conscience till the burden is often felt to be intolerable. It produces a dark night within the soul that no human means can remove. In parts of our country the smoke

arising from the furnaces or factories near will often, through the state of the atmosphere, descend again and bring a partial midnight even at noon-day. Thus sooner or later sin comes back, troubling the spirit, driving away all true peace, and making within a darkness that may be felt. There are likewise sorrows, griefs, distresses of various kinds, to which all are exposed. Sometimes the cloud of sorrow rests on one home, sometimes on another, but in turn it visits all; and where trouble has been the longest absent it often comes with the more sudden and terrible force. Very touchingly did an African woman express her deep woe on hearing of the death of her husband in battle. She cast down on the ground the infant that she carried at her breast, she tore her garments from the upper part of her body, and looking upwards to heaven she exclaimed,—“Cease ye winds, that my sighs may be heard. Cease ye raindrops, let my tears water the earth !”

And even where there is no manifest cause for it, where a bystander might imagine that all was well, yet there is many a one that goes forth to meet the calls of the day with a thick cloud oppressing the spirit; neither sun, nor moon, nor

stars appear, earthly comforts have lost their attraction, a black pall overspreads the soul, and it seems to the tried one as if no ray of hope or joy could ever penetrate. This may arise through some physical infirmity, the mind sympathizing with a feeble constitution; or it may arise through perplexing difficulties in providence or in revelation, or through great temptations; or possibly there may be a secret grief or fear of which others know nothing; but whatever be the cause, none but such as have experienced it can tell how great is that darkness.

To all this must be added yet one thing more. Death is ever standing by the door. All generations of mankind are travelling along the same road, and at the end of their course an open grave waits to receive them. On every forehead, whether that of the little child all blithe and gay, or that of one wrinkled by age, may be seen as it were inscribed the words,—“Dust thou art and unto dust thou shalt return.” At every turn we are reminded that in the midst of life we are in death, and that even now the swift arrow may be on its way that shall bid us cease from all earthly toil. And is there not a shrinking, and dread, a drawing back from the blow of the

destroyer? The most sensitive natures ever feel it the most, yet with all there is a fear of the last enemy that it is hard to overcome.

And where sin hath been indulged, where the world hath been set up as an idol within the temple of the heart, doubly fearful must be the thought of that summons which for ever robs a man of the one, and calls him to a strict account for the other.

May I ask the reader to pause here for a moment. Especially if your course be not far advanced would I press upon you this one point, that you would not hide from yourself your own true condition, and the realities of the world in which you live. Put not away from you the thought of sin, and sorrow, and death till they force themselves upon you. It is the character of English people to look the greatest difficulties in the face, and thus to learn how to overcome them. And be assured true peace is not to be found in building castles in the air, in regarding life as a bright midsummer holiday, but in recognizing the evils that pertain to it and learning how best to meet them.

And whither shall we turn but to One, even Jesus? Surveying in all its reality the moral

darkness of our world, His eye piercing to the very depths of human consciousness and of the gloom and evil that lurks there, in sight of it all the Incarnate Redeemer proclaims,—“I am the light of the world.”

Yea, He is the only true light; He is indeed the very Sun of righteousness that should arise with healing on His wings. He is the day-spring (or sun-rising) from on high that hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Jesus, Sun of Righteousness,
Brightest beam of Love Divine,
With the early morning rays
Do Thou on our darkness shine,
And dispel with purest light
All our night!

Jesus, the Sun of our souls! Oh, what rich grace is unfolded in this thought!

The sun is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit into the ends of it, and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof. It rises upon the climes where a long, cold winter

of many months hath held the earth in its icy bands, and brings there untold joy. It shines the same hour over far remote regions, and scatters its bright beams over vast islands and continents. It shines alike within the palace of the monarch and the cottage of the lowliest. It makes the earth burst forth with vegetation and fruitfulness. It calls forth the labourer to his daily toil, and awakens each morning myriads of songsters who fill the air with their joyous strains. With its rising there comes into being a sportive crowd of insect life which spend their little day in its warmth.

Even so dost Thou, O blessed Saviour, bring joy and life to all mankind! Thy grace is inexhaustible. Thou hast enriched with grace and mercy all who have looked to Thee, and yet Thou art none the poorer, but as rich as ever for those that come to drink in Thy light and life. With Thee is the light of forgiveness for the dark and guilty conscience. With Thee is the light of love for the desolate, the bereaved, the cheerless. With Thee is the light of hope, when it would seem to the eye of sense as if everlasting despair would settle down upon the soul. With Thee is the light that brings fruitfulness, making the

barren soul put forth all heavenly graces and virtues. With Thee is the light that makes men joyful, even in the dark valley of the shadow of death, and can fill the soul with gladness when every earthly light is extinguished for ever. With Thee is the light that in a better world shall shine upon Thy saints and make them joyful for ever in Thy presence.

Reader, come to this light and welcome the life and comfort and hope its cheering beams impart. Let a man go and hide himself in some underground cavern, or in some dark, damp cellar, then the glorious sun may be shining without, yet no benefit can he receive from its light and warmth. And if you refuse Christ, if you go into some dark cave of unbelief or earthly-mindedness or cherished sin and there abide, blame not the Saviour of mankind if you taste not the joy of His salvation ; it is not His fault, but your own. It is not He that refuseth to bless you, but you who turn away from the grace He bestows.

And let it not be forgotten, that it is only for a while this light is offered to sinners. Hearken to the words of Jesus : " Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you : for he that walketh

in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth." Some years ago, one Sunday afternoon, I took these words as the subject of exhortation to my flock. In the church was a man of the world, who yet seemed to give great attention to the message. Little did I then think how suitable to him was this word of the Master. It was his last sermon. The next Friday (Good Friday) he set off on his way to our village church, but he never reached it. He sank down by the way-side, and was taken home dead.

Who shall say how long, dear reader, the light may shine for you? If you still prefer the dazzling lights of earth, and shut out the light that cometh from heaven, how soon may everlasting darkness come upon you! Oh, delay not to receive Christ whilst He is near to shed upon your path through this dark world the beams of His heavenly light. There is a good old proverb worth remembering :—"By the street of By-and-by we arrive at last at the house of Never." It is a true witness. But few are there who have not purposed one day to turn to God, yet the day of grace has closed, and they have died without repentance or faith.

But let me say to the Christian reader, Not

only come to the light, but abide in the light, walk in the light. I have noticed old men bring out a seat on a bright spring morning and sit down in the warm beams of the morning sun. Oh, that Christian people would more frequently bask in the cheering beams of the Sun of righteousness. Oh, that by meditation and prayer and faith we could more delight ourselves in Him we love. Great would be the benefit. Not only should we more abound in joy and consolation, but sin would lose its power. As the rays of the sun have a tendency to put out the fire on the hearth, so would this Divine light extinguish the fire of evil desires, and unholy passions and tempers.

“ O that God would awaken me out of the sleep of indolence, and so kindle that fire of Divine love that this flame may always burn within me. O that I had the wood with which that fire might be continually nourished, that it might never more be quenched but always increase within me. O Lord, give me, I beseech thee, that love which can never cease, that will kindle my lamp and not extinguish it, that it may burn in me and enlighten others. Do Thou,

O Christ, our dearest Saviour, Thyself kindle our lamps, that they may evermore shine in Thy temple; that they may receive unquenchable light from Thee the Light that will enlighten our darkness, and lessen by us the darkness of the world. My Jesus, I pray Thee, give Thy light to my lamp, that in its light the most holy place may be revealed to me in which Thou dwellest as the eternal Priest, that I may always behold Thee, desire Thee, look upon Thee in love, and long after Thee. It belongs to Thee to show Thyself to us Thy suppliants, O Saviour, full of love, that we may know Thee, love Thee alone, think of Thee alone day and night, that Thy love may fill our souls, and that this love so great may never more be quenched by the many waters of this earth, as it is written, ‘Many waters cannot quench love.’ ”

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
“ I am this dark world’s light;
Look unto me, thy morn shall rise,
And all thy day be bright: ”
I looked to Jesus, and I found
In Him my Star, my Sun;
And in this light of life I’ll walk
Till travelling days be done.

III.

The Well of Bethlehem.

And David longed, and said, Oh that one would give me drink
of the water of the well of Bethlehem, that is at the gate!
—1 CHRON. xi. 17.

DAVID, like his Divine Son, knew by experience painful weariness, hunger, thirst, and lack of some place where he might lay down his head in peace. On one occasion, hiding in the cave of Adullam for fear of Saul, he craved that which would quench his burning thirst. He thought of the well from which as a shepherd lad he had often drunk, and longed for a draught of its sweet and refreshing waters. Then was it that he expressed his desire, probably never thinking for a moment of any one attempting to gratify it, “Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, that is at the gate.” David however had staunch and brave friends, who were willing to risk even life in the service of their chief. Three of his mighty men determined, if

possible, to obtain the water that he longed for. So they break through the host of the Philistines, whose garrison was at Bethlehem, and bring it to him. And now that the precious draught is obtained, David shrinks from tasting it. At such peril has it been obtained that he regards it as the blood of his captains. So he pours it out as an offering to the Lord. "My God," said he, "forbid it me that I should do this thing: shall I drink of the blood of these men that have put their lives in jeopardy? For with the jeopardy of their lives they brought it. Therefore he would not drink it."

The well of which David would fain have drunk was doubtless sweet and refreshing, but there is another well of Bethlehem sweeter still. Its waters are free to all comers. There need no armed men to force the way to it. And what is that well? An incarnate Saviour, a Redeemer born in Bethlehem to undo the ruin that sin had wrought, and to bring life and immortality to light.

The very name of the Saviour's birth-place, Bethlehem Ephratah, suggests the mercy that He brings. Bethlehem—the house of bread; Ephratah—fruitful:—thus pointing to Christ, the

fruit of the tree of life, the bread that is given for the nourishment of our souls.

And so again the well at Bethlehem's gate may speak to us of Him. It may remind us that He is come to be to mankind a well-spring of joy, hope, consolation, and peace ; that He is that very Fountain of Living Water, of which whosoever drinketh shall live for ever.

And who shall fathom this deep well ? What a depth of marvels in the Word made flesh and tabernacling amongst us ! What depths in that name "Emmanuel"—God with us ! "The mighty God," and yet needing a mother's tender care ! His goings forth from everlasting, and yet an infant of days ! The Heaven of heavens cannot contain Him, and yet He is wrapped in swaddling clothes ! The everlasting Jehovah His Father, yet a poor Galilean maiden His mother ! Many mansions in the Father's house are at His disposal, and yet He is denied a lodging in a village inn. Worshipped of angels, and yet perhaps under the same roof with the beasts of the field. Oh, what a mystery of humility, what a mystery of condescension and love ! In the sight of Bethlehem, who shall make much account of lands and houses and goods ? In the sight of the

meanness of Christ's birthplace, who but must be ashamed of all self-glorying and pride ?

" He that is sent to save men," writes Bishop Hall, " is sent for His first lodging to the beasts ; the stable is become His inn, the crib his bed. Oh strange cradle of that great King which heaven itself may envy ! O Saviour, Thou that wert both the maker and owner of heaven and of earth, could'st have made Thee a palace without hands, could'st have commanded Thee an empty room in those houses which Thy creatures have made. When Thou did'st but bid the angels avoid their first place, they fell down from heaven like lightning ; and when in Thy humbled estate Thou did'st but say, ' I am He,' who was able to stand before Thee ? How easy had it been for Thee to have made place for Thyself in the throngs of the stateliest courts ! Why wouldst Thou be thus homely, but that by contemning worldly glories Thou mightest teach us to contemn them ; that Thou mightest sanctify poverty to them whom Thou hast called into want ! "

" Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high, who humbleth Himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in earth ! " Thus in David's day speaketh the Spirit of God

through him. But how much more may we say of Christ even than this ! Hath He not humbled himself not only to behold our earth, but to dwell amongst us ? Nor only so, but he takes the lowliest place ; born of a lowly virgin, working afterwards at a lowly craft, and walking through life a companion of the lowly, a friend of publicans and sinners.

If Peter the Great of Russia was accounted worthy of double honour because for a season he forsook the throne, and for the benefit of his subjects submitted to toilsome labour and a humble position amongst men, how much more shall we glory in our Emmanuel who thought it not too much for our sake to descend from His glory, to take upon Him our nature, and in that nature to endure toil,—yea more, to be despised, to suffer and to die !

And if in this well of Bethlehem there be a depth of mystery and condescension, so likewise is there an inexhaustible spring of joy and consolation. What tidings of good ever equalled those tidings of great joy which the angel brought to the shepherds when he announced the birth of the Saviour of mankind ?

Is it news worth hearing by those that are

light to dispel its gloom; but now the way of life is clear: man is redeemed, salvation is brought nigh, peace in Christ may be our portion on earth, glory with Christ our portion beyond.

Hark! a voice from yonder manger,
 Soft and sweet,
 Doth entreat:
 Flee from woe and danger.

.

He came to bid the weary rest,
 To heal the sinner's wounded breast,
 To bind the broken heart;
 To spread the light of truth around,
 And to the world's remotest bound
 The heavenly gift impart.

He came our trembling souls to save
 From sin, from sorrow, and the grave,
 And chase our fears away:
 Victorious over death and time,
 To lead us to a happier clime,
 Where reigns eternal day.

But will you not drink of these waters?
 Will you not partake of the grace which Jesus
 hath brought to our world?

Be not content to slake your thirst at broken
 cisterns. Of these to which Jeremiah refers as
 an emblem of vanities which cannot profit, an

Eastern traveller thus writes :—“There are thousands of these ancient cisterns in Upper Galilea. No comparison could more keenly rebuke the madness of the people than the expostulation of the Prophet,—‘ My people have committed two evils : they have forsaken Me, the Fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.’ The best cisterns, even those in solid rock, are strangely liable to crack, and are a most unreliable source of supply of that absolutely indispensable article, water ; and if by constant care they are made to hold, yet the water, collected from clay roofs or from marly soil, has the taste of earth, is full of worms, and in the hour of greatest need it utterly fails. Who but one gone mad would exchange the sweet, wholesome stream of a living fountain for such an uncertain compound as this ? ”

Reader, will you learn the lesson ? Strangely doth our adversary beguile us ; craftily doth he ever strive to substitute *something else* for the one abiding source of peace. It may be something that just suits the taste at a particular time ; it may be something in itself both lawful and desirable ; but if it is put in the place of Jesus,—if the heart strongly lean upon it and trust to it,

it becomes a broken cistern, which will most assuredly one day utterly fail.

But if you would drink of this well you must force your way to it in spite of any difficulties that may meet you. David's captains were not deterred by the host of the Philistines. You must not turn back though discouragement, and doubt, and hindrance bar your way. The Eastern Magi, when they would drink of this well, had to encounter the perils of a long journey : yet they came and drank thereof, and "rejoiced with exceeding great joy." Only persevere like them, continue in the prayerful study of Holy Scripture and in earnest supplication for Divine grace, and you too shall succeed, and your success shall prove an infinite recompense for all your toil.

Last of all, let down the pitcher of faith for a draught. Believe, and you shall rejoice. Heartily welcome the glad-tidings. Receive them as for yourself, as sent to you by your Father in heaven, to comfort you, and to guide you through your course. Receive as for yourself the message, that in Christ God is reconciled to you ; that in Christ you have a Brother-man, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, who can sympathize

I succour in the darkest day of adversity ;
that He will roll back from you the curse that
aches to your sin ; that He will destroy in
the works of the destroyer by subduing all
your infirmities ; that He will guide your feet
to the way of peace ; that since He hath become
Son of Man, He will make you a son of
God, and a joint-heir with Himself in the ever-
lasting kingdom.

The words of Robert Mc'Cheyne on the foun-
tain of Siloam, may suitably close our medita-
tions :—

Beneath Moriah's rocky side
A gentle fountain springs ;
Silent and soft its waters glide,
Like the peace the Spirit brings.

The thirsty Arab stoops to drink
Of the cool and quiet wave ;
And the thirsty spirit stops to think
Of Him who came to save.

Siloam is the fountain's name :
It means "*One sent from God.*"
And thus the Holy Saviour's fame
It gently spreads abroad.

O grant that I, like this sweet well,
May Jesus' image bear ;
And spend my life, my all, to tell
How full His mercies are.

IV.

The First Miracle.

And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: and both Jesus was called, and His disciples, to the marriage.—JOHN ii. 1, 2.

IN a wild and desolate region of Galilee the traveller comes upon a deserted village. Round about it the hunter follows the wild boar that finds a home in the neighbouring thickets; within the village silence and desolation reign. There still remain indeed the ruins of its lime-stone dwellings, and some half-century ago a few inhabitants might have been found there, but relentless war and the inroads of Arab marauders have swept over it, and now it lies waste without a single living inhabitant.

Yet here is a spot, more sacred, more dear to Christians than the mightiest cities of antiquity. Here is a place to which myriads of hearts will ever turn in their day of hope and gladness.

Here is Kana-el-Jelil,—Cana of Galilee as it was called in days past, where our Lord first manifested His Divine power at a happy bridal feast.

The mother of Jesus at this time was living at a distance of some seven or eight miles, and from the interest she took in providing for the necessities of the guests we may infer that she was either a relation or an intimate acquaintance of one of the families. Something in connection with Nathanael, His new disciple, may have brought Jesus to Cana, since the former belonged to this place, and only three days previously Jesus was near the Jordan, some fifty miles distant from this village.

But whatever may have brought Him into the neighbourhood, we find Jesus and His disciples invited to the marriage. Nor doth He refuse. That scene of cheerful festivity shall be hallowed by His presence. He who sheds unnumbered joys over the angelic intelligences in heavenly places will now show forth His grace and love within a humble dwelling in a Galilean village. He who, as Creator in Paradise, instituted the holy ordinance of marriage now comes near, as the Son of Man, to bless the ordinance which He had appointed.

And who hath a right to forbid that which the Lord in tender love hath thus appointed and blessed ? What right hath any Church to forbid her ministers taking at their discretion the help-meet which God provides ? Only put side by side this scene at Cana and the decree of Pope Hildebrand separating those whom God had joined together, and thus causing perhaps more intense misery to faithful souls than the fiercest persecution that ever raged against the Church ; and what more painful example can we find of the tradition of man bringing to nought the command of God, marring the genial love of the Gospel dispensation, and taking away blessings that our merciful Father hath granted ?

Who shall tell the miseries of countless young hearts set apart for the cloister by the wish of parents, or in the unwise zeal of their early religious life ; and then, whatever they might afterward desire, not daring, because as they imagine it would be at the peril of their souls, to break the vows with which man had cruelly bound them ?

Reader, be persuaded that the religion of Holy Scripture cultivates and guides, but is never intended to repress or extinguish, natural affec-

tion. To some it may seem a great virtue to trample underfoot the relationships of life, to forsake father and mother, brother and sister, to be dead to those pure joys which our Father hath granted to us, and thus to exercise a high degree of self-denial ; but unless it be to fulfil some special duty to which He hath called us, or in obedience to some very plain intimation of His will, — this honoureth not Him who is the Fountain of goodness, the God of love, and who delighteth in nothing more than in the happiness of those whom He hath made.

Truly we must be ready, if need be, to sacrifice all rather than deny Him who has the first claim to our affections ; otherwise we must let the flame of heavenly love warm our hearts with a stronger and purer glow toward earthly kindred, endeavouring to exhibit towards them something of the love which we ourselves have received, and thus to draw them on with ourselves along the pathway of light and peace.

But we go back to Cana. Wine is lacking, possibly through the additional guests, and now there is fear lest the enjoyment of the day should be disturbed. The mother of Jesus names to Him the discomfort that has arisen. It may be

that she looked to Him for counsel as to what had best be done, but it is more likely that He had given to her some previous intimation of what He purposed to do; so she places the matter before Him, saying, "They have no wine."

Bear in mind that Jesus careth not only for our greater, but also for our lesser, wants. He can pity alike those that have a conscience sorely distressed by sin, and those that have been pained by some very small matter; so that in all cases we cannot do better than follow Mary's example. "Whether we want bread or water or wine, necessaries or comforts, whither should we run, O Saviour, but to that infinite munificence of Thine which neither denieth nor upbraideth anything? We cannot want, we cannot abound but from Thee. Give us what Thou wilt, so Thou give us contentment with what Thou givest."

Yet there was in Mary's words something not altogether pleasing to Christ. There was something of command, of dictation which He would not permit to pass unreproved. She had not that due reverence for Him which she ought, and therefore, whilst He purposes abundantly to grant her desire, He gently chides her:—"What

have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come."

He would thus remind her, that though she were His mother, yet they stood altogether on a different footing. From natural feelings she may be anxious about the wants of those present, but His chief work is to do the will of God. It was very much the counterpart of that question which eighteen years before He had put to her when she found Him in the temple:—"Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" And if there be not here any act or word that we could declare positively sinful, yet is there not enough to show that in many there remained at least the taint of our fallen humanity? Is there enough to manifest the folly of such a dogma as that of the Immaculate Conception?

Very strange likewise is the error which places Mary so high in honour; which exalts her to the position of co-mediator with Christ, yea, which often confides more in her mercy than in His. Doth He not place on a level with her all those that do the will of God? "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." Doth He not go even beyond this, and tell us

that in His sight to hear the Word of God and do it is a far higher honour, a far more blessed thing than to be His mother after the flesh? When one spake to Him,—“Blessed is the womb that bare Thee, and the paps which Thou hast sucked,” He answered,—“Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the Word of God and do it.” Hence, Mary herself is far more to be honoured because by faith and love she enshrined her Divine Son within her heart, than because God had chosen her to be the instrument through whom Christ should become incarnate.

“O blessed Virgin,” writes Bishop Hall, “if in that heavenly glory wherein thou art, thou canst take notice of these earthly things, with what indignation dost thou look upon the superstitions of vain men, whose suits make thee more than a solicitor of Divine favour! Thy humanity is not lost in thy motherhood, nor in thy glory; the respects of nature reach not so high as heaven. It is far from thee to abide that honour which is stolen from thy Redeemer.”

But whilst Jesus gently reproves His mother, He lets fall an expression which may encourage *her to look for a fulfilment of her request in due season* :—“Mine hour is not yet come.” Delays

are not denials. He who heareth every prayer, and supplieth every need, doth so not always *as we will*, not always *when we will*. He hath all means and all time at His disposal, so that He chooseth the best means and the best time of fulfilling the desires of them that fear Him.

Christian, remember this word of Christ. Let it be thine answer to every impatient murmur, to every unbelieving thought that may arise during a period of prolonged suspense: "Though the vision tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not tarry."

Every creature-hope and trust,
Every earthly prop or stay,
May lie prostrate in the dust,
May have failed or passed away;
Then, when darkest falls the night,
Jesus comes, and all is light.

Mary gives to the servants good counsel. She looks for Christ to manifest His gracious power, though she might not fully know in what manner and how soon He would do so. So she bids the servants mark His commands, and readily obey them. She saith to them,—“Whosoever *He saith unto you, do it.*”

Learn here that whosoever would receive

blessings from Christ must cheerfully perform whatsoever He requireth. The path of unreserved obedience is the only one in which we can look for proofs of His love and power. Precepts and promises are knit together, and none may attempt to separate them. Every precept implies a promise ; every promise calls for the fulfilment of some precept. Happy are they that strive and pray that they may carefully regard the very least command, and who rejoice in all the promises which Christ hath given ! "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me ; and he that loveth Me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him."

The command which Christ gives to the servants is a very simple one. There are set there six waterpots of stone containing altogether about a hundred and twenty or thirty gallons. Too much store, it may be, did that household place in these outward purifyings which cannot cleanse the soul. A deeper work did they need, and one that none other could perform for them but that Guest who then stood in their midst. Not the water in those waterpots, but that precious blood which He would shed, could

remove those guilty stains which defile the inner man.

Jesus bids the servants fill the waterpots with water, and not doubting the wisdom of the command they fill them up to the brim. In a moment the change is effected. He who in His ordinary providence maketh the vine to give her clusters, and thus bestoweth the wine that maketh glad the heart of man, now dispenses with the intermediate steps, and bestows by His miraculous power the wine that was requisite. The servants are first conscious of what Christ has wrought, and bring of the new-made wine to the ruler of the feast. The ruler of the feast was one who presided for the purpose of maintaining order, and of relieving the bridegroom from unnecessary anxiety as to the due entertainment of those present. He tastes the fresh wine, and knowing not whence it is, bears a testimony to its excellence. In a tone of pleasant railillery he calls out to the bridegroom,—"Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now."

Deferring to another chapter some thoughts

that arise with reference to the glory of Christ as manifested in this miracle, let us from these last words lay to heart a lesson that has been drawn from them. Christ and the world give in very different fashion. The latter gives at first its very best, but afterwards that which is worse; but Christ gives to his disciples first of all tribulation, and the bitter wine of a sorrow that worketh repentance, and afterward everlasting peace and glory. The lesson cannot better be taught than in the words of Jeremy Taylor as quoted by Archbishop Trench, in his valuable work on the miracles :—“The world presents us with fair language, promising hopes, convenient fortunes, pompous honours, and these are the outside of the bowl ; but when it is swallowed, these dissolve in an instant, and there remains bitterness and malignity. Every sin smiles in the first address, and carries light in the face, and honey in the lips ; but when we ‘have well drunk,’ then ‘that which is worse :’ a whip with six strings, fears and terrors of conscience, and shame and displeasure, and diffidence in the day of death. But when, after the manner of the purifying of the Christians, we fill our waterpots with water, watering our couch with tears and

moistening our cheeks with the perpetual distillations of repentance, then Christ turns our water into wine; first penitents and then communicants,—first waters of sorrow and then the wine of the chalice; for Jesus keeps the best wine to the last, not only because of the direct reservations of the highest joys till the nearer approaches of glory, but also because our relishes are higher after a long fruition than at the first essays, such being the nature of grace, that it increases in relish as it does in fruition, every part of grace being new duty and new reward."

O draw me, Saviour, after Thee,
So shall I run, and never tire;
With gracious words still comfort me,
Be Thou my hope, my sole desire;
Free me from every weight, nor fear
Nor sin can come if Thou art near.

What in Thy love possess I not?
My star by night, my sun by day,
My spring of joy when parched with drought,
My wine to cheer, my bread to stay;
My strength, my shield, my safe abode,
My robe before the throne of God.

V.

The first Miracle—continued.

This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth His glory; and His disciples believed on Him.—JOHN ii. 11.

WE see in our Lord changing the water into wine His glory as the Creator of all things. In the first chapter of this Gospel it is written that “all things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.” It is plainly evident from this miracle, and also from that of the loaves and fishes given in the sixth chapter, that the claim was a just one. It was no less a power than that which could create a world, that could thus change or multiply the elements.

But look deeper into the purpose of this miracle. It manifests Christ not only as Creator, but Redeemer. It foreshadows something of the glory of His character and work as the Saviour and the Friend of sinners.

We may learn that Christ is the Friend who alone can sanctify and bless all home relationships. Within the family circle there are wheels within wheels, various feelings, dispositions, desires; there are members of the household of peculiar tempers and organizations; and there are ever apt to occur trials and difficulties, little misunderstandings, petty annoyances, and the like, so that the various wheels are apt to clash or become entangled one with the other. Hence there is ever needed the oil of heavenly love to make all things work smoothly together. And this Jesus imparts by His presence. He can knit and bind together husband and wife, brother and sister, parent and child. He can make men to be of one mind in a house. He can remove the causes of domestic disquietude and irritation. He can fill our dwellings with such a spirit of blessed and holy peace as testifies of the source whence it arises.

But Cana also teaches that Christ is the One whom we should desire to abide with us in our day of earthly gladness. Would you imprison religion within the walls of a sick chamber? Would you forbid it access in season of life's bright sunshine? Would you bid Christ stand

waiting at the door of your heart till some sore calamity fall upon you, or till the sands of life are nearly run out? Tell me, why should this be? Will you esteem Christ, as did the unprofitable servant, a hard man, an austere man, one who can have no sympathy with your joys? Will you in your inmost heart look upon Him as a thief who would rob you of your chiefest bliss? Would you reckon that some day it may be needful to make Him your Friend, but that now, whilst everything looks pleasant and hopeful, it is wiser to keep Him at a distance? Ah, how you wrong Him, yea too, wrong your own soul! Surely you forget Cana, surely you forget that bridal feast, surely you forget that He who would not for His own necessity change stones into bread, changeth water into wine to promote the enjoyment of the guests! Surely you forget that He delighteth in nothing more than in the true happiness and prosperity of His servants! Surely you forget, moreover, that you need His gracious keeping in the day of your gladness, as much as ever you need His heavenly consolations in the day of your sorrow. "In all time of our wealth, good Lord, deliver us!"

And how instructive is it to place the eleventh chapter of this Gospel in close juxtaposition with the narrative of the first miracle given to us in the second! It is the same lesson of the Saviour's sympathy, but under very opposite circumstances. In the one we have a wedding, in the other a funeral. In the one we have a company of cheerful guests, in the other a band of mourners. But Jesus is alike present at both. He increases the joy of Cana, He lightens the grief of Bethany. He rejoices with those that do rejoice, and weeps with those that weep.

I would bid you, dear reader, ever think of Cana in your joys, and so likewise think of Bethany in your troubles. Think how wisely, how mightily He wrought to remove in due season the bitter trial which His own love had appointed. Think how tender was His sympathy with the sorrowing ones while the trial lasted. Think of that agonizing groan! Think of that falling tear!

“Jesus wept!”—these tears are over,
But His heart is still the same;
Kinsman, Friend, and Elder Brother,
Is His everlasting name.
Saviour, who can love like Thee,
Gracious One of Bethany?

“Jesus wept!”—that tear of sorrow
Is a legacy of love :
Yesterday, to-day, to-morrow,
He the same doth ever prove.
Thou art all in all to me,
Living One of Bethany !

But we may gain a further light from this miracle. We may discover something of a parable in those water-pots filled to the brim with wine of Christ’s providing. For doth it not set Him before us as the bountiful Giver of heavenly grace? Very frequently is wine employed in Scripture as the emblem of spiritual blessings. We have Wisdom’s invitation in the book of Proverbs:—“Come eat of my bread and drink of the wine which I have mingled.” We have the voice of mercy in the Prophet Isaiah crying aloud to men to “buy wine and milk, without money and without price.” So again have we the promise of Gospel days, that “the Lord of Hosts will make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of wines on the lees well refined.”

Yes! the grace and mercy of Jesus, the pure joys that He gives, the consolations of His love, the fellowship of His Spirit, are like this wine of Cana, the very best that can be found.

Where beside can you obtain such true heart-gladness, where else can you find hopes, promises, satisfactions, that are untouched by earth's woes, that abide when all else shall pass away?

And there is no fear that the supply will ever fail. It was possibly to teach us this that so abundant a provision was made of wine at the feast. Not for a moment can we imagine that one there would take too freely of Christ's bounty, when the Master Himself was by. None could teach more plainly than He the peril of that terrible sin which proves a downfall to multitudes, that is such a dark blot on our favoured land. It was the very purpose of His advent to teach men "to live soberly, righteously, and godly." He warned His disciples lest at any time their hearts should be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness. It was through His Spirit that the Apostle Paul exhorted the Ephesians that they should not be filled with wine wherein is excess, and declared to the Corinthian Church that no drunkard should inherit the kingdom of God.

Will the reader permit me here to utter a kindly caution, which to many may be altogether needless, but which to others may be of the

deepest importance? If there should be the very least danger of your falling into this deadly sin, beware ere it be too late. Even as medicine be very cautious of taking that which might afterwards become almost a necessity; and if you do take it for this purpose, continue it not for a day when the season that called for it has passed by. The growth of such habits is very stealthy, and may become an iron chain about you ere you are aware of it. Far better abstain altogether, if an enlightened conscience tell you that it is not easy for you to keep within the most careful limits. "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation."

But there is no danger of partaking too freely of the new wine which Jesus bestows. "Drink abundantly, O beloved!" is His call. Myriads in days past, myriads in our time have tasted its precious draughts, yet there is still an ample sufficiency for all.

Come, ye who have believed, but are yet feeble in grace and feeble in service, come yet again and again; take larger and larger supplies. Is Jesus tired of giving? Is the Spirit of God straightened? Nay, ye have been remiss in desiring, and slow in asking, hence you receive

less than you might. Bring yet more vessels, expect yet more than you have done heretofore ; open thy mouth wide, and He will fill it.

Come, ye who are wretched and undone, tired of earth's joys, and yet ignorant of that which is better; ye who know the sting of an accusing conscience, and the aching of a weary or fearful heart, come, try the Saviour's love ! Come, taste and see that the Lord is good ! Come, receive the cup of salvation, and call on the name of the Lord.

Ah, sinner, if thou drinkest not here, remember there is another cup, there is other wine of which thou must drink.

"In the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red ; it is full of mixture, and He poureth out of the same ; but the dregs thereof all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out and drink them." Yea, the man who refuses the gift of life and salvation, "shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God." Oh, choose the better part ! Take the cup of love, the cup of blessing, the cup in which is found every element of everlasting peace and joy.

In another respect we may behold in this miracle the glory of the Redeemer. Since the fall everything has been marred and corrupted

by sin. With its deadly touch it hath pervaded the whole creation. In the beginning all things were made very good, but now they have become very evil. Every where may we trace the slime of the old serpent.

But Christ is here manifested as the mighty Alchymist, transforming, changing, restoring all things. By His power the water, comparatively but little worth, is changed into the wine, exceedingly precious and costly. Thus does Christ ever work. He changeth the vile into that which is of highest value. "He maketh all things new."

Into every "Marah" fountain, into every affliction and trial He is ever ready to cast a branch of the tree of life, thus making the bitter waters sweet; in other words, He waits to turn that which in itself is grievous and painful into a means of increased holiness and heightened joy.

In place of this old world, groaning beneath the burden of woe that lies upon it, He will make "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." In place of Jerusalem that once was He will create the New Jerusalem which shall come down from above, as a bride prepared for the bridegroom.

In place of this corruptible body He shall

give a body glorious and immortal, fashioned like unto His own. Yea, that which is the inner centre of all, He changeth the heart and spirit of man, turning the sinner into the saint, the fallen one into the holy child of God, a fit inhabitant of the celestial kingdom, according as it is written, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new."

The fierce demoniac, a terror to all around, He changeth into the meek and obedient disciple, "sitting at his feet, clothed and in his right mind." "The woman that was a sinner" He changeth, so that she becomes an example to all for the great love which she bestows upon Him. The dying malefactor He changeth into an heir of paradise; Saul, the persecuting Pharisee, into Paul, the very chiefest of Apostles; the jailer, hardened in his sin, into the rejoicing believer; the Corinthians, aforetime drunkards, thieves, revilers, and the like, into members of His Church,—washed, sanctified, and justified in His name, and by the Spirit of our God; the Ephesians, dead in trespasses and sins, having no hope and without God in the world, into "fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God."

And ever since His exaltation to the right hand of the Father has He ever been carrying out the same gracious design : destroying in men the works of the devil, lifting them up from the degradation and bondage of sin, adorning them with all heavenly virtues, and making them partakers of the Divine holiness.

Reader, hath this work in any measure been wrought in thee ? Search and see ; for without it there can be no sitting down with Christ at the marriage feast above, where Jesus is the Bridegroom and His Church the Bride. If it hath not been hitherto, plead with Christ in fervent prayer that it may be so now. Plead with Him, that all which is dark He would illuminate with His heavenly light ; all that is hard and unfeeling, He would soften and subdue ; all that is defiling He would purify ; all that is weak He would strengthen ; all that is low and of earth He would elevate ; all that is crooked He would make straight ; all that is of vanity and self and the flesh He would cast out ; that your heart, once by nature full to the brim of evil, as those water-pots of water, may henceforth by His grace be full to overflowing of the new wine of peace, *holiness, and love.*

VI.

Nicodemus.

Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour
Jesus Christ.—**2 PETER III. 18.**

THERE are but three incidents given us with reference to Nicodemus, and these are all found in the Gospel of St. John. But they throw great light upon his course. They set him before us as an example of growth in grace, and of increase in the knowledge and love of the Saviour.

In the third chapter we have his first lesson in the school of the great Teacher. We may suppose that as one of the Pharisees he would be a moral man, a learned man, in a sense a religious man. Like Saul of Tarsus, he would be zealous for the law, and blameless in all its ordinances. For instruction he comes to Christ, being persuaded by the miracles that had been wrought that Christ could be *none other* than a messenger sent of God. *He comes, however, fearful of the reproach that*

he might incur. That he came by night was not merely because there might then be a better opportunity for converse, but because he dreaded at that time being known as a follower of Jesus. "The same that came to Jesus by night," is the remark that the Evangelist always attaches to his name.

But who hath despised the day of small things? Jesus at least never does. He breaks not the bruised reed, nor quenches the smoking flax. The least of good doth He ever cherish, lifting up the hands that hang down and strengthening the feeble knees. He receives Nicodemus, and teaches him the way of life. He puts before him the absolute necessity of a new birth unto righteousness. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, that which is born of the spirit is spirit." "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." "Marvel not that I said unto you Ye must be born again." Our evil hearts, our corrupt natures, must by the Spirit's grace be cleansed and renewed. There is so much of deadly sin concealed within the breast, even of the most amiable and gentle, that nothing less than the Holy Ghost—first regenerating and *then perpetually renewing the soul*—can fit us for

he pure joys of a better world. "Sin is like the poison in a serpent's fang, or a wasp's sting, constantly reproducing itself. You may remove the leadly juice from the cup of a noxious flower, but if you go back next day the cup has gathered its poison again. Our hearts are such cups. Day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment, they are seeking to refill themselves with what God hates. Only the Holy Spirit's unceasing influence is sufficient to empty them of sin and fill them with holiness."

But Jesus sets before the inquirer another truth. He has spoken words of solemn warning, now He speaks to him words of hope and promise. He tells him of the Father's love. He declares that He Himself has come to be lifted up, as the brazen serpent of old, the remedy for the spiritual sicknesses of men. He opens wide the door to all that will confide in His salvation. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (Ver. 16; see also 14, 15, 17, 18.) The seed is cast into the ground, how will it grow? Will the convictions that have begun to work in the heart of Nicodemus pass away, or will he retain the truth and cleave to it?

Will he be as the wayside or rocky ground, or as the good ground that beareth fruit a hundred-fold ?

Let us see ? Turn to John vii. 50—52. Two years have passed away since that eventful night ; and it is clear that the seed has been taking root, and is now appearing : first the blade, as it shall afterward the ear and the full corn in the ear. The officers sent by the chief priests refuse to lay hands on Christ, so greatly had His words taken hold upon them. Then the Pharisees say to them, "Are ye also deceived ? Have any of the rulers or Pharisees believed on Him ? But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed." No longer Nicodemus can be silent. He ventures a remark. True, it was not a very strong one, yet it required no small amount of courage to make it. He showed them that there was at least one ruler, one Pharisee who would not condemn Christ. He was not afraid to bring down suspicion and envy upon himself. " Nicodemus saith unto them, he that came to Jesus by night being one of them, Doth our law judge any man before it hear him and know what he doeth ? They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee ? Search and look : for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet."

Blessed are they who, like this Jewish ruler, hear the Word of God and keep it. With too many every trace of it, even where for a moment interest has been excited, soon fades from the memory. Christ hath said, "If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed : and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Another year passes by. Again Nicodemus is brought before us. And now very marked is the advance that he has made. He is no more the timid inquirer; no more the one who ventures with trembling a word on behalf of the Master, but the bold and devoted disciple. It was at the time when all looked the darkest. The enemy has triumphed : Christ is crucified : the disciples have fled : Judas has betrayed Him, and Peter denied Him ; yet even then Nicodemus proves his faith and love. He unites with Joseph of Arimathæea in going in boldly and begging the body of Jesus. He brings a costly gift, a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight. He assists Joseph in carrying the precious body of our Lord, and laying it in the new sepulchre. What a glorious triumph of faith ! How truly in him were the words fulfilled that "the last should be first." When we might have looked for Peter

or John or James to come forward, we hear nothing of them ; but these two men, Joseph and Nicodemus, hitherto secret disciples, now stand out fearlessly that they may honour Him whom their associates have despised and rejected.

When least we expect it doth God raise up those that confess the name of His Son. Amidst all the mockery that greets His ear on the cross, there is but one voice heard to declare His innocence and His kingly majesty ; it is that of a criminal,—the thief that hung beside Him. And when the spirit has fled and all is over, when all else have fallen back, those to our thoughts most unlikely claim the privilege of carrying Him to the tomb.

Nicodemus thus affords a bright example to those that are setting their face Zionward. Nothing is impossible with God. Grace can uphold the weakest, and give boldness to the most fearful. Thus the righteous holds on his way, and he that hath clean hands becomes stronger and stronger. Doubtless Nicodemus must have been much in prayer, he must have hidden the word of Christ deep within his heart ; thus the Spirit was given, and from a little child in the Divine life *he grew into the fulness of the stature of Christ.*

Sometimes we see the very reverse of this : those promising much at an early stage of the Christian life yet after a while growing cold and faithless, leaving their first love, grieving the Spirit, and thus losing much of the peace and joy which once they possessed. In his valuable work on Ancient History, Sir Henry Rawlinson tells of the two great rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates. He speaks of the latter losing much of its waters in the marshy lands through which it flows, and reaching the point of junction with the Tigris far less in bulk than during many parts of its previous course. The sister stream, however, increases the bulk of its waters as it proceeds. Receiving tributaries on either side, and losing comparatively little, it flows with deeper current as it reaches the mouth.

Often do we find the lives of two persons in Christ's Church differing as much as the course of these two rivers. In the one there is a painful decrease in zeal, spirituality, and usefulness. The strength is drawn off into other channels. Worldly interests, the allurements and gratifications which earth affords, family cares and the like, steal away the best of the heart's affections. Watch such a *one after the interval of a year or two has passed,*

and it is not difficult to perceive there is less of Christ, less of a heavenly mind, less of a tender concern for the soul's of others, and for the welfare of Christ's Church.

What a mournful history is that of King Solomon! In his infancy called Jedidiah, the beloved of the Lord; upon his entrance to the kingdom, the Lord giving to him so gracious a promise of wisdom, as also of temporal blessings; yet leaving behind, as the chief lesson of his life, his witness to the utter vanity of those things on account of which he had forsaken the God of his father.

But take the other picture. There may be by God's grace, a deepening of the Divine life in the soul, there may be an advance as years go on. As with Nicodemus, experience of God's love may expand the heart. There may be an ever-deepening humility through the increase of self-knowledge. There may be an ever-deepening faith and love through the increase of the knowledge of Christ. Through watchfulness and prayer grace already received may be held fast. Tributary springs may bring in fresh supplies of the water of life. Watering others, a blessing returns to themselves. Praying for others, others

likewise pray for them. Careful, painstaking study of Holy Scripture, and meditation upon its truths, the reading of sound practical Christian books, incessant supplication for the Holy Spirit, a believing use of Divine ordinances, the faithful reception of the Holy Communion, are so many branch streams that bring in from time to time fresh measures of heavenly grace. Thus the Divine life in the soul prospers, and when all on earth is over an abundant entrance is ministered into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Let me here press the inquiry upon each of those into whose hands these pages may fall,— Which river doth your course most resemble? What saith your own conscience? Is there indeed a growth in grace? Do the things of the present life appear less to you, and the things beyond as all-important? Doth Holy Scripture open out to you, even in its simplest portions, precious views of Divine truth? Is there a growing sensitiveness at the approach of sin? Is there more submission to the will of God? Is there a closer cleaving to the Friend of sinners?

To be content without this is most perilous. It implies that the pulse is very low, even if life

yet remain. It calls for an immediate return to the Fountain of living waters. “Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.”

Come nearer : nearer still !
Let not Thy light depart ;
Bend, break this stubborn will,
Dissolve this iron heart.

Less wayward let me be,
More pliable and mild ;
In glad simplicity
More like a truthful child.

Riper and riper now
Each hour let me become,
Less fond of things below,
More fit for such a home.

Leave nought that is unmeet ;
Of all that is mine own
Strip me ; and so complete
My training for Thy throne.

VII.

I have Sinned.

Enter not into judgment with thy servant : for in thy sight
shall no man living be justified.—PSALM cxliii. 2.

SOME years ago I saw a remarkable document. It was a catalogue of the crimes committed by a man who had been at last executed in Norfolk Island, with the punishment recorded which he received for each offence. This terrible, awful list, was nearly three yards in length, and had I not known it for a certainty, I should have doubted whether it were possible that so much evil could have been crowded into a single life-time.

The thought of this catalogue may suggest to us a profitable, though a humbling lesson. It may lead us to inquire as to the record of our iniquities made with unerring justice by the pen of the Omnipotent. Take the life of one who is *yet a stranger to God*, and who is walking in the

way of his own heart, who shall tell how countless are the transgressions of such a one ?

Begin with acts of positive disobedience,—the sins of your youth, the dishonour done to parents, broken Sabbaths, dishonest gains, such things as even natural conscience reproves, and doth not a still small voice whisper that there is something amiss in these things ?

Add to these, sins of the tongue,—angry words, murmuring words, backbiting words, words that have a tendency to deceive or to suggest unholy imaginations ; look at these in the light of that saying of Christ—“Verily I say unto you, that for every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.”

Add to these, multitudes of unhallowed thoughts and desires, crowds of vain and foolish thoughts as many as the motes in the sunbeam, and remember again the word of God—“The thought of foolishness is sin.” Think of the years you have lived ; go back to your school days, and to the years that have passed since then ; go back to days of special trial and of special mercy ; *think what were your feelings and motives, what was the bent of your mind at such times ; think*

how many evil things in word, thought, or deed, may be found in every one of the many thousand days that you have already lived, and if you are honest with yourself, you will surely confess that the record of your sin, written out by the hand of the Most High, would reach almost from earth to heaven : according to that confession of Ezra—“ Our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens.”

Perhaps, however, we gain a more impressive view of this truth, if we regard the life of a man without God as one long sin. What was the life of the younger son, spoken of by our Lord in the parable, whilst he remained in the far country ? Was not every moment one of rebellion and ingratitude, and *therefore a moment of sin* ? No doubt there were hours of deeper excess than others, hours when he plunged deeper into the mire of vice and pollution, yet was not his whole life, and every moment of it, till he returned home, sinful and rebellious ?

Now is it not so with every sinner till he yields to the merciful call of God—till he comes home as a penitent to the Father’s house ? Each moment is he living a life of practical atheism ; *each moment is he* nourished and preserved by a

Father's goodness, and yet all the while spurning the hand that feeds and guards him.

O careless, thoughtless sinner! be assured of this, thy life is one long-continued sin, one continued act of provocation in the eyes of thy Creator. *Wherever you may be*, in the house of God or in the house of business, in the field or by the way-side, in some scene of worldly dissipation, or sitting with your family by your own fireside,—*whatever you may be doing*, eating or drinking, talking or sleeping, rising in the morning or going to rest at night, yet, till you return to God with hearty and unfeigned repentance, you are every moment sinning against Him.

Hence we see how unscriptural is the view that represents the majority of men as vibrating between sin and holiness, neither worthy to be accounted saints, nor so bad as to be reckoned altogether sinners.

Only take the right view of sin—that which represents it as the transgression of a holy law—and you will see at once that till men are renewed in the spirit of their minds, they are altogether sinful and guilty in the sight of the Most High.

The Apostle Paul lays it down as the ground-



work on which he sets forth the way of God's righteousness, that man has broken the law, that every one without exception is exposed to the curse and just displeasure of God. He looks at the whole race of mankind in one light, and as being in one position. He places them on the same level, on the same platform of guilt and condemnation. He declares that "there is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God;" and that the law has so spoken "that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God."

True, in one respect there is a difference, and a very serious one. There is a difference as to the amount of debt which a man owes, as to the amount of guilt for which he is liable to punishment. The man who has reaped twenty acres will receive a larger payment than the man who has reaped but ten; the man who has done a week's work will receive more wages than the man who has worked only a day. So doubtless shall it be with those who are dealt with for their sins. The more sin, the longer sin, the more guilt and consequently the greater punishment.

Yet let not any reader think that here at *least is a point in your favour*, because you have

been kept from some very glaring iniquities into which others have fallen. Remember that God's view of sin is very different from your's. If you were to point out one whom you considered the greatest offender, you might go to some dark prison and point to one about to suffer for his crimes: but if God were to put His finger on one whom He reckoned the worst, He might go to some favoured congregation, and find one there in the midst of Christian privileges, who was stealing his heart against a Saviour's love, who was persistently rejecting the offers of salvation, who hated spiritual religion, who was living in unbelief, and thus making God a liar; and thus knowing his Lord's will and doing it not, might be ranked in His sight as one of the very greatest transgressors. What have been our privileges and opportunities, what knowledge we have had of His Word and of those who have loved it, what warnings and invitations to repentance we have heard, what life we have lived in the inner world of our own hearts,—all this must be taken into account ere we can determine whose sin is most heinous in the sight of our Judge.

But in another sense there is no difference. *Every soul of man, till forgiven, is liable to ever-*

lasting death. The most moral, as the most degraded, stands alike in this position. A conqueror passing through a country which he has subdued bids the inhabitants of a certain town not to cross a boundary line which he has marked out, and threatens death against all who shall go beyond it. If one of them cross it, though it be but a yard's space, he is equally exposed to the penalty as one who might go several miles. The holy law of God is like that boundary line. Whosoever transgresseth it is guilty. He may go but comparatively a little way, he may go very far indeed, yet in either case he comes within the curse. "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."

Believe it, reader, and ponder it, that were it possible that through your whole life you had committed *but one sin*, and that one but a vain thought cherished within, you are as truly brought within the iron grasp of a strict and holy law as if you were the most notorious offender. Would you therefore stand on a firm foundation that neither death nor judgment can ever shake, begin here. Be sure that the law fastens a charge of *deadly guilt* on every single member of the human

family. Hence put aside all thought of your own personal merit. Lean not so much as the weight of a single grain on your own doings or feelings. Try not to lessen your danger or blunt the edge of the law by any excuses, or extenuating circumstances, or the greater evils that others may have wrought. Have you broken the law, or have you not? If you have, confess it plainly; regard yourself as wholly undone; take your right place—a sinner in the dust before God; make the prayer of David your own:—“Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, O Lord: for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified.”

But why insist so much on the necessity of this? Why doth St. Paul so urge men to self-condemnation? Is it to shut them up to despair? Is it to make them doubt the possibility of their salvation? Nay, it is the very reverse. It is to show men the suitableness, the all-sufficiency of the righteousness which God hath provided. It is to show men that the same glorious Gospel of the grace of God can meet the wants of every living soul. Were the one man *partly* condemned, and another, further fallen *into sin, wholly* condemned, there would need

two systems, two gospels,—a little gospel for the one sinner, a great gospel for the other, but now the same message comes to all. What saith it but this : “ I cannot receive you whilst you rest in any measure on your own merits ; but come to Me only a sinner, and here is a glorious righteousness wrought out for you by the obedience and death of My Son. Consent to be clothed upon with this, and you shall never be condemned, but shall inherit everlasting life ” ?

Do you accept the offered gift ? It is bestowed freely. It is without money and without price. By faith embrace it, and it is your own for ever. What reply doth your heart make ?

The careless heart saith—“ Why should I seek for it ? What profit will it bring to me ? Give me health, give me success in my plans, give me prosperity in my affairs, and it will be time enough by and by to think of the world to come.”

The self-righteous heart saith—“ I thank Thee, Lord, that I am not as other men ; I have much that will stand me in good stead when judgment approaches ; many have sinned more deeply than I ; let me have some part at least in the merit of my salvation.” So it puts away the gift and *perishes*.

The doubting heart saith—"It cannot be for me, I am too unworthy, I am too great a sinner: I must first pray more, and repent more, and perhaps at length God may be willing to bestow so great a boon upon me." So here again the consolation and the hope is cast aside.

But the believing heart, taught of the Holy Ghost, answereth far otherwise :—"Gladly, O Lord, do I welcome Thy proffered mercy ; sin is the best that I can call my own, my own righteousness is but a garment spotted by the flesh : but I thank Thee from the very ground of my heart for a righteousness in which I can stand guiltless before Thee ; may I never cease to abhor myself for all that is mine, and to bless Thee for all that is Thine."

Thus doth peace arise in the soul : thus doth true humility abound side by side with hope, and joy, and love : thus doth the justified one desire evermore to keep low before God under a sense of his own deficiencies ; and the goodness which hath been shown towards him becomes the strongest ground for life-long contrition of soul. He fears not to call God his Father, for the righteousness in which he trusts is the *righteousness of the Righteous One* : he fears not to

search out and to confess the very utmost of his iniquity, for it cannot go beyond the reach of the atoning blood.

“Almighty and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that Thou hast made and dost forgive the sins of all them that are penitent, create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins, and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of Thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Jesus, we rest in Thee ;—
In Thee ourselves we hide :
Laden with guilt and misery,
Where could we rest beside ?
'Tis on Thy meek and lowly breast
Our weary souls alone can rest.

Thou Holy One of God !
The Father rests in Thee,
And in the Savour of that blood
Once shed on Calvary.
The curse is gone—through Thee we're blest :
God rests in Thee ;—in Thee we rest.

VIII.

The Best Cheer.

Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.—MATT. ix. 2.

THERE is something that sounds strange in these words when we remember the circumstances under which they were spoken. A palsied man is brought by his friends to Christ for healing. A crowd around the Saviour prevent their coming to Him, but if one way is closed they will seek another. So they carry the man upon the house-top, and then, after removing the slight awning over the inner court where Jesus was preaching, let him down in the midst. Then Jesus beholding their faith, beholding their perseverance and determination to bring the sick man nigh to Him, uttered this word of kindly greeting—“Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.”

They are surely not words we should have looked for; they seem at first sight unsuitable

to the occasion. What should we think, if in taking to an eminent physician of one whom we dearly loved and about whose health we were very anxious, he were to pass by the subject on which we sought his aid, and were to give words of spiritual counsel ? Doubtless most persons would feel as many did at Capernaum, when Jesus thus addressed the palsied man. But after all it was the right word. Those who stood around could see only the paralysed frame : Jesus looked deeper and beheld a conscience wounded by sin. Affliction had been doing its work. It had led the man to reflection, to remembrance of former evil, to repentance and a desire for pardoning mercy. And Jesus knew it ; He knew what was in man. Very often, as in this case, did He answer the thoughts of the heart, rather than any words that fell from the lips. He knew that to this penitent no gift would appear so desirable as the forgiveness which He so freely granted.

Reader, will you learn hence one great purpose that God hath in sending affliction, either now or at any other time, to darken your home. It is to awaken your conscience to a vivid apprehension of sin. It is to unlock the storehouse of

memory, that you may set before your eyes ways and words and deeds that may almost have passed from your recollection. It is to remind you that there is a peril connected with sin, that the law demands its punishment, that surely there is a judgment yet to come, most severe and terrible to those not sheltered in the riven side of the Redeemer. At such seasons God would have you humble yourself under His mighty hand ; yea, even though you may long have known His love. He would have you make use of your time of retirement to inquire diligently as to your soul's welfare, remembering your latter end, and that the night quickly cometh, when no man can work.

Such lessons as these, through the grace of the Spirit, have not seldom been learnt in the day of affliction. The widow of Zarephath, so happy for a while in the presence of Elijah and the marvellous provision given her from day to day, is bereaved of her only child. The loss is unspeakably great, but she hears the voice of Him that appoints it. The iniquity of former days, perhaps some one sin in particular, is brought home to her. She saith to Elijah, " What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God ? Art thou come

unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?"

A young woman in Kent for many a long month wasted away under a disease that at length wrought her death. Very patiently did she bear her cross, and very thankfully did she receive the instruction that was given to her. From her sick bed arose the first true prayer that ever she had offered. She was reading the 25th Psalm; when she reached the 18th verse, she could read no more. It seemed to her to be all she needed. Again and again did she lift up her heart in the petition which the Psalmist breathed—"Look upon mine affliction and my pain, and forgive all my sins." It was the dawn of her spiritual life, the first beam of that light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

From these words of Christ we learn that He delights exceedingly to forgive men their sins. It is sometimes imagined that after long waiting, after many prayers and many tears, He may be moved to bestow mercy on the sinner. The very reverse of this is the truth. It is He that waits long, with many entreaties knocking at the door, *beseaching men to accept His salvation.* In His

tender love He ever rejoices to bestow that fruit of His work which they are so unwilling to receive.

As an evidence of this, we need not go beyond this narrative. Before a word is uttered, before a prayer is offered, or a confession of sin made, the Lord, who knew his heart, grants the man a frank, immediate, unconditional forgiveness. The Lord knew that which he longed for. He recognized the faith which he had in common with those who brought him, and crowned it with a promise that must have filled his soul with gladness.

If any reader be in a like frame of mind, it is most needful for you to remember the readiness of Christ to forgive sin. There are two ways in which sin may be regarded,—as a *breach of law*, and as a *perilous and deadly disease*. It is a breach of the Divine law, and as such needs pardon ; it is a disease, a leprosy that cleaves to the nature of a man, and as such needs a sovereign remedy by which it may be overcome and rooted out. And Jesus undertakes to provide both for those who turn to Him, and in faith commit their case into His hands. But mark the order : first He forgives, then He purifies and cleanses the soul. First He justifies the ungodly ; then

He sanctifies them, and makes them meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. Laden with the guilt of a life-time, sins after baptism or before it, sins known to the world, or sins secret to all but God, bend low before the cross of Christ, acknowledging thine iniquity, and believe, yea believe assuredly, that from His mediatorial throne Jesus doth at once pardon all, and make it, as regards the punishment due to it, as though it had never been. But be not deceived. Where this is the case, thy sin will be loathed, hated, forsaken. He that hath pardoned thee will so instruct thee by His Spirit, that thou shalt renounce the evil and follow the good ; hungering and thirsting after righteousness, till thou shalt stand perfect in His own image before the throne.

In the case of the paralytic, Jesus gave a proof that His Word of forgiving mercy was a reality. By that which they could see, might the men of Capernaum be led to believe in that which they could not see. That they might know that the Son of Man had power on earth to forgive sins, he bids the palsied man arise and walk. So before them all he took up his bed and went forth, a plain witness to the might and authority of Him who had healed him. In like manner

doth Jesus now give men evidence of the reality of His forgiveness. He bids the forgiven arise and walk with God, and ever gives them strength so to do. From old habits of evil, from a paralysis of deadly indifference doth He deliver and save. So that by a newness of life, by a walking in holiness and love, do they manifest the grace which Jesus hath bestowed.

Reader, I beseech you honour Christ by laying aside all pre-conceived ideas, and entering readily into the way which He hath chosen for bringing you out into the full enjoyment of His great salvation. Accept forgiveness as the boon of His free love. Accept it at the very beginning of your Christian course. I have known a Christian lady who for years was in bondage, because she regarded forgiveness as the goal rather than as the starting place of the Christian life. She wished to be holy that she might be forgiven, instead of seeking forgiveness that she might be made holy. Do not fall into the same error. Whatever lack there be in your repentance, your love, your obedience, bring it to Christ's footstool, confessing its guilt, and be assured that He will at once forgive. Then take the joy of forgiveness to aid you in your conflict

with evil. Arise from all sloth, self-indulgence, and the like, and walk closely and humbly with thy God. Be harmless and blameless as a child of God in the midst of a perverse and crooked generation. Tamper not with the least evil, for it will grieve the Spirit, and bring a cloud between God and your soul. Perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord. Be zealous to excel in every Christian grace and virtue. Let no reproach be cast upon the name of Christ through your inconsistency. "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

There is yet another lesson which we may gather from the words of Christ. The forgiven man has ever ground for rejoicing. Look at this paralytic. While as yet unable to walk a single step, while still lying helpless on his couch, Jesus bids him rejoice, for his sin is blotted out. "Son, *be of good cheer*, thy sins be forgiven thee." And it must be so. Whosoever is forgiven of God, hath received a gift that is the pledge and foretaste of the greatest bliss which man can know.

"Blessed is the man whose iniquity is forgiven

and whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile."

Whatever be your present lot, whatever tribulations await you in the future, if your sin be no more remembered, why should you not evermore rejoice and be glad ?

Look upward, and you may rejoice that you have there a Father who loves you, a Saviour who pleads for you, angels to watch over you, and a mansion preparing for you. Look downward, and as you think of the grave whither you are hastening, rejoice that the sting of death is gone ; that the grave shall be a quiet resting place for the body till the morning of the resurrection.

Look around you, and as you reflect on the changes of this passing scene, rejoice that all shall work together for your good ; that whatever of earthly comforts you may have to part with, God will by and by give you much more than these ; that whenever you bid farewell to the companions of your pilgrimage, you may yet look forward to a blessed reunion, for that all who are one with you in Christ here shall be one with you in glory hereafter.

Look backward, and can you not trace for-

bearance and loving kindness following your every step? Look forward, and be assured that your best Friend will never leave you nor forsake you, and that in the ages to come you shall experience ever more and more of His everlasting mercy.

But if you know nothing of forgiveness through the blood of Christ, what right have you to rejoice? Rejoice, and still unpardoned! Rejoice, and the wrath of God abiding on you every moment! Rejoice, and death swiftly pursuing you, and the Son of God soon to appear as your Judge, and you know not how it may be with you! Rejoice, and the sentence of eternal death recorded against you! Who ever heard of feasting and merry-making in the condemned cell on the eve of an execution? And what hast thou, my brother or sister who art still in thy sins, what hast thou to do with joy, since every breath you draw and every pulse that beats, you approach nearer to a terrible destruction; and before another day shall dawn, you know not but the great bell may toll that makes angels mourn, that tells of another soul hopelessly, irretrievably lost. What will the world's good cheer, its glittering toys, its enticing gratifications, its highest

ambitions, its richest possessions, avail then ?
What solace will they give when the trumpet sounds, when the Judge appears, when eternity is revealed ? Oh, hear the voice that calleth thee to repentance. Forsake thy sin and live. Have faith in Christ and He will save thee.

There is life for a look at the crucified One,
There is life at this moment for thee :
Then look, sinner, look unto Him and be saved,—
Unto Him who was nailed on the tree.

It is not thy tears of repentance or prayers,
But the blood that atones for the soul ;
On Him then, who shed it, thou mayest at once
Thy weight of iniquities roll.

His anguish of soul on the cross hast thou seen ?
His cry of distress hast thou heard ?
Then why, if the terrors of wrath He endured,
Should pardon to thee be deferred ?

Then doubt not thy pardon, since God hath declared
There remaineth no more to be done ;
That once in the end of the world He appeared,
And completed the work He begun.

But take with rejoicing from Jesus at once
The life everlasting He gives ;
And know with assurance thou never canst die,
Since Jesus thy righteousness lives.

IX.

The Nobleman of Capernaum.

A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench.—MATT. xii. 20.

THREE schoolmasters are engaged in the instruction of the Lord's family. Moses, the law-giver, teaches them the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and the guilt of breaking the least of the commandments. Christ, the great Prophet, teaches them by His faithful sayings, by His holy example, by His ever blessed Spirit, the way of life. Affliction also is our teacher. The rod is the voice of the Lord. It speaks, as God appoints, sometimes in the abode of the lowly, sometimes in the mansion of the great. It brings home the teaching both of Moses and of Christ. It brings down high thoughts; it makes men to know how vain is all earthly grandeur, that the glory of man is but as the flower of grass; that here we have no continuing city; that it is our wisdom

to seek above all things a kingdom that cannot be moved, and during our pilgrimage to lean only on Him who never faileth to succour those that trust in His grace.

It was thus with the nobleman whose coming to Christ is given in John iv. 46—53. This man was one of the courtiers of Herod Antipas, and dwelt at Capernaum, between twenty and thirty miles from Cana, where we find our Lord on the occasion of this miracle. The nobleman's son is laid low with an attack of fever, and of so severe a character that it appears well-nigh impossible that he can recover. For any lesser cause the nobleman would probably have hesitated to apply to Christ, for it was no slight matter for one in such a position to seek help from Jesus of Nazareth. But love to his child triumphs over every scruple, so he comes to Cana, earnestly beseeching Christ to come down and heal his son.

O blessed affliction which brings the sorrowing one to the feet of Jesus ! The cloud may be dark and threatening, yet behind it is the brightness of heavenly consolation, if only it lead you to go strait to the Friend of sinners.

But for this, it is little likely that the officer of *King Herod* would have come within the

re of a Saviour's love. High station, the pride of man, the lust of the eyes and the pride of self might still have reigned supreme within ; now that he comes nigh, now that an errand of necessity has removed the veil that hid his secret from his view, who shall say what ever-lasting joy may arise from his first approach to the Lord of life and glory ?

ever, never reckon that an evil which takes you with an errand to thy Saviour. Whether it be for thyself, or for one beloved ; whether it be joy, or sorrow, or anxiety ; whether it be the unkindness of your dearest friend or the unkindness of those around you, reckon it alike to be most welcome gain, if it draw you for the first time or for the thousandth time to the Saviour's footstool. But Jesus does not at once grant the father's request. Beneath the surface He detects much of the nobleman's faith that was very imperfect, and that needed raising to a higher level. It was a faith that needed the support of signs and wonders, and that sought a temporal blessing rather than too little regard to the grace and love of God that should grant it. So Christ answers the thoughts of the inner man rather than the spoken words. *To save a soul was more to Him even*

than to save a life ; so, as the good Physician, He still more deeply wounds that bleeding heart, that afterward He may bind it up and pour in the oil of heavenly consolation. Jesus meets the nobleman with a solemn reproof, including within its range those that stood around : " Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe."

Already had abundant ground been given for faith, had not the hearts of the Jews been hardened in unbelief. Had not Christ been born in Bethlehem according to the Prophet ? Had not angels borne witness to Him, and Simeon and Anna spoken of Him as the promised Messiah ? Had not a voice been heard at His baptism, testifying to His being the Son of God ? Might not His words of heavenly wisdom have been enough to convince them that He was more than man ? Yet, for all this, without signs and wonders they will not believe ; and when signs and wonders are granted, very soon the impression is altogether lost. What a contrast is presented in the very same chapter. Look at the Samaritan. Without the aid of a single miracle, only by the report of the woman, and afterward by hearing the words that fell from His own lips,

o they believe on His name. Not only do they believe in Him as some great One, as Elijah or that Prophet, but they rise at once to the very highest degree of faith, they confess Him to be ‘the Christ, the Saviour of the world.’

Who sees not here what is most needed if we would become partakers of Christ? It is not signs, or miracles; it is not greater privileges or fresh opportunities; it is not a more favourable position in life; it is not better sermons or a clearer Bible, but it is a simplicity of mind, a desire for spiritual blessings, a heart taught of the Holy Ghost. Are you yet without faith? For what are you waiting? Do you imagine that some sign, some solemn event happening under your eye, some fresh means of grace will bring you to faith and repentance? O hearken not to this syren’s voice, it will only deceive you. Come and believe now. Cast aside your old prejudices. Cast aside that world-loving spirit. In dependence upon the Spirit’s aid, draw nigh to Jesus; come to Him with confession of former neglect: “Lord, I believe: help Thou mine unbelief”

But the nobleman does not stay to reply. The reproof doubtless touches him to the quick, but

does not drive him away from the only Helper. He is evidently a most loving father, and his deep anxiety for his son again comes out. While he speaks, we may almost hear a groan and see a hot tear in every word :—“Sir, come down, ere my child die.” As if he would say, “Ah, Lord, truly my faith is nought, but my child is dying, he will soon be gone : oh, deny me not my request, come down speedily to my help.”

The mingling together of faith and unbelief in this appeal is worthy of notice.

We mark a reliance on the Saviour’s power to heal, a faith not only beseeching at first but persevering ; a faith overleaping a repulse and still looking to the Lord ; a faith resembling in some measure, though in a far less degree, that of the Syrophenician woman : “Truth, Lord ; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.”

Yet with this there is no less evident imperfection. There is a limiting of the power of Christ in two directions. Christ must be *present*, or it would avail nothing. “Sir, *come down*.” Very different was the Spirit of the Centurion : “Speak the word only, and my servant shall *be healed*.” Then too, it must be—“Ere my

child die." Power to heal the nobleman believed Christ to possess, but he could scarcely expect more. That Christ could also raise the dead was altogether beyond the grasp of his faith.

But we cannot be surprised at this, nor would we blame him. To him, as yet, had little comparatively been given, and therefore but little was required. It was his first approach to Christ; he had as yet but little knowledge of Him. Probably he had not hitherto seen one of His miracles.

But is it not otherwise with thyself, believer? Is not the knowledge of Christ fully revealed to thee in Holy Scripture? Is not the whole story of His wondrous life spread before thee? His sojourn here, His atoning death, His glorious resurrection, all are given, and moreover invitations and promises that meet every case.

Yield not then to the sin of Israel in the wilderness. Limit not the Holy of Israel. Narrow not the sphere of His power to help. Let not time, or place, or circumstance prove an obstacle to your faith.

Say not in a distrustful spirit, "Would that I could see some proof that Jesus hath received me, *that my prayer is heard*, that I shall be delivered.

from this trial." Remember that sight-faith is no faith at all. Believe first,—you shall see afterward. Take as a little child every word that the Master hath spoken, and rely upon it as infallibly true. Raise to the very highest degree your conception of the all-sufficiency, the resistless might, the unchanging faithfulness, the boundless love of the Saviour; raise to the highest pitch your thoughts of the prevailing character of Christ's mediation, both with reference to your present acceptance, the answer to your prayers, and your preservation unto life eternal; and then rest assured that as far as the heaven is above the earth, so far doth the grace of our Lord immeasurably exceed the utmost bound of your feeble imaginings.

Jesus again replies to the nobleman. Now it is to grant his request; yet in granting it, to try once more, and thus to increase, his faith. The father asks for Christ's presence: He vouchsafes him but His word. "Go thy way, thy son liveth." Yet was it not a still better gift? Had Christ gone with him according to his wish, the son must have had some hours more of suffering; he might meanwhile have died, thus causing fresh sorrow to the household. Besides, the fresh

trial of faith brought also lasting benefit to the father. "With one word," writes Bishop Hall, "does Christ heal two patients,—the son of the fever, the father of his unbelief."

How like to this are Christ's dealings with His people at all times. He giveth not exactly as we ask, or what we ask, but what we should ask, what is better than all we have sought for. He is the good Physician, the great Healer, who uses the bodily infirmities of ourselves and others, that He may heal all our spiritual diseases. He banishes every fever of the mind : eager haste to be rich, unruly lusts, fiery tempers, angry passions, impatient murmurings against the Divine will.

The message is received in the assurance of faith. The discipline of Christ has not been lost. Though He has never seen the son, or touched his hand, yet the nobleman believes that a single act of His will, a single word of His power is enough to restore his son.

Nor does he go hastily back in mingled fear and hope. So confident is he that all is well, that he tarries awhile. Leisurely he returns by the way that he had trodden in such haste. It was only a short time after mid-day that Christ

speaks. Without difficulty might he have reached Capernaum that evening, but not till the next day does he reach home. There need be no hurrying hither and thither where there is faith. Steady reliance on the Lord's promise ever brings with it quietness of spirit: "He that believeth shall not make haste."

As he returns the servants meet him. And it is observable that they use *as the relation of a fact* the very words that Christ had used as a *promise to the father*. "Thy son liveth," saith Christ, and the fever took its flight as He spoke it. "Thy son liveth," say the servants in bringing the welcome news. Nor was it, as the father inquired, that "he began to amend;" but "the fever left him." As in the case of Peter's wife's mother, it was not a gradual recovery, but immediate restoration to health.

Learn ever from this to receive the promise of Christ as facts. That which He speaks with His mouth doth He ever fulfil with His hand. That which is matter of promise to-day, will be simple history to-morrow. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My word shall not pass away."

The healing of the son becomes a means of

spiritual blessing to the whole family. The father yields up himself to Christ. Nor need we be surprised that the mother's heart is touched, or that the young man feels bound to render up the life restored to him. How many belonged to that household we know not, but this we know, that Christ became the centre of every heart. Even in Capernaum, doomed through its unbelief to a worse condemnation than that of Sodom, one family is found saved in Christ for ever.

Happy is that home where Christ dwells, where all delight to love and follow Him. "With Thy blessing, O Lord, let the house of Thy servant be blessed for ever!"

It may be profitable to review Christ's dealings with this suppliant. Tenderly doth He fulfil the word prophesied, that a bruised reed He should not break, nor quench the smoking flax. He rebukes, but He does not reject him. He raises a faith which was very defective to that which could triumph in His salvation. He leads one, who as a loving father seeks a child's restoration, to become a true, steadfast believer, to the everlasting peace of himself and his family.

Let those who have as yet but little faith, learn to hope in Him and wait upon Him for its

increase. He will not cast away a few grains of gold because of the dross mingled with it. He blows not upon the glimmering taper, but guards it with His own hand. He tramples not upon the tender plant, but supports it with His rod and staff. "He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength."

An example may afford encouragement to some readers.

A man well known for his Christian principle had many doubts as to the reality of his interest in Christ. He loved the Sanctuary ; he loved the people of God ; he walked consistently in the ways of the Lord, yet could seldom rise to the joy of faith. During his last illness his doubts increased, so that at length he exclaimed, "I have lost my Saviour." For two days and a night this anguish of mind continued. At length the Lord rebuked the Tempter, and comforted His servant who longed for His salvation. While alone the day previous to his death, his wife in an adjoining room heard him exclaim, "O, my Saviour ! He has come again, He has come again." Nor was this impression transitory. This tranquillity and joy lasted till his spirit took its happy flight

to the land where all darkness is extinguished for ever in the light of the Saviour's countenance.

When in clouds and mists the weak ones stray,
He shows again the way ;
And points to them afar
A bright and guiding star.

Yes ! His little flock are ne'er forgot,
His mercy changes not ;
Our home is safe above,
Within His arms of love.

Tenderly He watches from on high
With an unwearied eye ;
He comforts and sustains,
In all their fears and pains.

Through the parched dreary desert He will guide
To the green fountain side ;
Through the dark stormy night,
To a calm land of light.

Hallelujah.

X.

Bread from Heaven.

Jesus said unto them, I am the Bread of life; he that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst.—JOHN vi. 35.

JESUS was ever as faithful in His rebukes as He was gracious and tender in His consolations. A crowd flock around Him. They come not with a desire to hear His words, or to follow Him as their Master. They come only in hopes of temporal advantage. Nor doth this escape His observation: “Ye seek Me not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you, for Him hath God the Father sealed.” He then, in answer to their inquiry, bids them *believe on Him*, as that which above all things *the Father requires*.

In their unbelief they ask a sign. Forgetful of that marvellous exhibition of Divine power which they had of late witnessed in the feeding of the five thousand, they speak of Moses giving them manna in the desert, and would have Christ manifest some similar proof of His power. Jesus grants not their request, but reminds them of that other bread which the Father was now giving, and that of which all other was but the type and shadow : “ Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not the bread from heaven ; but My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He that cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.”

Taking the words in a mere natural sense, they ask that they may receive this : “ Lord, evermore give us this bread.” Then Jesus points to Himself : “ Earthly bread I have already given you ; but for the nourishing of your souls you must feed on Me. I am the Bread of life ; I am the living Bread that came down from heaven : if any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever.”

It is evident that human hearts are tormented by unsatisfied longings, cravings after a good which

they find not. The most excellent creatures that God hath made, were all combined, could never make the boast—"I have satisfied one soul." One height gained is but to open out the vision to one still higher. One blessing granted only makes it plain that something still better must be given ere Paradise be regained. Hence the confession of the one who above all had made the experiment: "Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity." Hence the sorrowful complaint of the Prophet: "Wherefore spend ye your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not?"

Wisdom's children have discovered the secret: there is satisfaction, but it is only in God. "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks so panteth my soul after Thee, O God." "My soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is." "O satisfy us early with Thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days." "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips; when I remember Thee upon my bed, and meditate on Thee in the night watches."

"He satisfieth the longing soul and filleth the hungry soul with goodness."

It hath pleased the Father that in Jesus should be laid up the fulness which can meet all our desires. For this reason doth He speak of Himself as the Bread of life, and gives the assurance that whoso cometh to Him shall never hunger ; and he that believeth on Him shall never thirst.

In His atoning death is the satisfaction of the sin-defiled conscience. The conscience enlightened to discern anything of the true character of sin is evermore oppressed by a sense of wrong doing, and this before God. It accuses the soul perpetually of transgression against a holy law, and wearies itself to find means of pacifying the just displeasure of the Almighty.

But when the Spirit reveals Christ, the conscience finds rest. The one sacrifice perfected by Him on Calvary becomes the ground of hope. The self-condemned transgressor, owning his exceeding guiltiness, ceasing any longer to seek for peace in his worthiness, his best doings, his most religious feelings or dispositions, draws nigh to the Mercy-seat with this alone as his all-sufficient *plea* : "I merit everlasting exclusion from

the presence of Jehovah; my iniquities have shut against me the door of the kingdom, but Jesus, by His crucified body, by His riven side, by His most precious blood, hath made for me a new and living way, by which with boldness I can approach the throne."

My sins deserve eternal death,
But Jesus died for me.

The fearful spirit now receives a joyful liberty; the trembling soul comes back, like Noah's dove, to the ark of rest,—a Father's bosom, and a Father's love.

Thus doth the soul by faith eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man. The crucified body of the Redeemer in a most real and true sense becomes the nourishment and satisfaction of the inner man.

Christ is also the satisfaction of the human intellect. "In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Is not the knowledge of the High and Holy One, that inhabiteth eternity, the very highest that can be attained? It may be interesting to find history in the earth's strata, or in the changes that take place in a language, or to discover the laws that regulate

mind or matter, but is it not something far beyond this to learn, though it can be but a little, of the ways and works of the Creator, of the mind of Him in whom we live and move and have our being? And where can we gain this but in Christ, in His Person as the Incarnate Son, in His holy and loving character, in the salvation which He accomplished and in which all the Divine perfections were so marvellously exhibited? Where can we gain it but in that revelation made through Him, as the Great Prophet of His Church, and which points to Him as the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and End of all? All this cannot fail to impart, the more it is studied, the truest satisfaction to the believing soul.

“ Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom ; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me ; that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth ; for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.”

Jesus Christ is also the satisfaction of the truest, deepest affection of which the heart of man is capable.

Who but needs a heart on which he can re-

pose? Yet where on earth can be found one upon which it is wise or safe to lean all our weight? The warmest love has its limit, however sweet the consolation it may afford. It may fail us through the instability that is inherent in man, or it may fail through the separation that one day must take place. Even on the morning when the dream of years may be fulfilled, one sentence, "till death us do part," comes in to tell of a parting at last.

But who can trust too implicitly to the love and faithfulness of Christ? Where is the limit to that love which many waters cannot quench, which has a height and depth and breadth and length that none can scan or comprehend? What circumstances shall arise that will lead Him to forsake His own? Infinite in its measure, eternal in its duration, the love of Christ faileth never.

I need Thee, precious Jesus! I need a Friend like Thee;
A Friend to soothe and sympathise, a Friend to care for me:
I need the heart of Jesus to feel each anxious care,
To tell my every want, and all my sorrow share.

Is any reader looking hither and thither for that which will still the restless desires of the soul? If you will, seek it in a round of gaiety and dissipation; seek it in the accumulation of

wealth ; seek it in aught that is of earth, yea, seek it even in an external religiousness, the mere performance of any number of religious duties ; and soul-famine, soul-starvation will be the sure result. Like the younger son in the parable, you will one day be ready to " perish with hunger." There will be within a fearful void, a deep of wretchedness that no words will be able to express.

But on the other hand there is that peace, that hidden manna of heavenly consolation in the Friend of sinners, that can satisfy to the very utmost. Only ponder that which is revealed of Him, only by faith take hold of His promise, and cleave fast to Him, and your confidence will not be disappointed. A young Brahmin, a teacher of English in a school at Santipore in India, became very restless and uneasy in mind. He scarcely knew why it was, but he felt something was wanting, and something was wrong. For many months he wandered from shrine to shrine, seeking peace but finding it not. He came back to Santipore, but soon again left it on the same errand. To him it was not Santipore, the city of peace, as the word expresses, but the city of untold distress.

He came one day upon a strange missionary, who was preaching Christ to a crowd of hearers. Rammoy longed for peace, but he hated the Prince of peace, so he stood up and opposed the missionary. The servant of Christ bore with him with all meekness, reasoned with him, and finally lent him a copy of the New Testament. The entrance of the Word gave light. He read, pondered, wondered, believed. Thus he expressed the consolation that it brought to him:—"I gazed upon the cross of Christ, and as I gazed the ponderous load fell off my heart: I rejoiced in Jesus." At Calcutta a few months afterward, together with his young wife, he was admitted into the Church of Christ.

Such is the peace, the heart-satisfying rest, which the anxious soul may find in Jesus. And it is the Holy Spirit working faith in Christ, leading the inquirer to take His promises and confide in them, by which the blessing is brought nigh. It has been already implied, but it needs to be plainly stated, that only by faith can any one feed on the Bread of life. Again and again does our Lord repeat it, that to come to Him and believe in Him is the means whereby the soul is satisfied, and whereby eternal life is

obtained. Since then He tells us in another verse that unless we eat His flesh, and drink His blood, we have no life in us, He must still refer to faith in Himself as the means of doing this. Hence the great importance of the Holy Communion. Christ hath appointed it for this very purpose, that by the remembrance of His dying love our faith in Him may be quickened. It is a time when we may look for the Holy Spirit to draw our thoughts and desires heavenward, and kindle a flame of hope and love. Take heed however lest you be led astray by the idea that there is anything of a sacrificial offering in this ordinance, or that the elements of bread and wine become in any way changed, or by reason of the prayer of consecration are charged with any special virtue or invisible supernatural grace. Such notions are but the traditions of men: they are not to be found in Holy Scripture, nor can they be proved thereby. Besides, they contradict the whole tenor of the scheme of salvation, and are altogether opposed to the glorious Gospel of the grace of God. The Lord's body is not in the elements, but in the heavenly places; the Lord's grace is not in the bread and wine, but in your own heart if you be His.

We might remind the reader of a word fallen from the lips of Christ that very plainly bears upon this point. The Jews imagined bread eaten with unwashed hands defiled a but Jesus sets them right. He strives to abuse their minds of any such thought. He tells them that nothing which they eat can by means defile them, "because it entereth not the heart." It is only received into the body system, whence it passes away. Now the statement stands perfectly good if you substitute the word "sanctify," for "defile." That which you eat and drink, even though it be the sacred membra of the body and blood of our Lord, cannot sanctify you because it entereth not into the heart.

Very clearly doth our Church distinguish between the partaking of the elements, and the heart being nourished by faith in Christ. Notice the words spoken to each communicant: "Take and eat *this* (*i.e.* the bread) in remembrance that Christ died for thee: and *feed Him in thine heart by faith* with thanksgiving. The natural mouth, so to speak, is that by which we receive the bread into our bodies: the spiritual mouth, faith, is that by which we receive Christ into our hearts.

No, no, reader, look not for the grace as if
the carnal elements conveyed it; beware of an
idolatrous reverence for the bread and wine, or
you will be losing the substance for the shadow;
but look upwards to the throne and fix your
mind on the invisible realities that are shadowed
forth. Fix the eye of the mind steadfastly on
Christ Himself. Look for the gift of the Spirit
according to Christ's promise. Not only at the
time when you receive the elements, but during
the whole service, look for Him to be very
present with you, feeding the inner man of the
spirit with His most precious body and blood, re-
minding you of His love, and preparing you for
that day when you shall sit down together at
the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Look down in love, and from above
With Thy Spirit satisfy;
Thou hast sought me, Thou hast bought me,
And Thy purchase, Lord, am I.
Let me find Thee,—let me find Thee
Here on earth, and there on high.

No other prayer to Thee I bear,
O my Lord, but only this:
To show Thy grace, to see Thy face,
And to know Thy people's bliss.
Let me find Thee,—let me find Thee:
Thee to find is blessedness!

XI.

Submission in Trial.

The cup which my Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?—JOHN xviii. 11.

IT is very instructive to compare these words of our Lord with those spoken by Him in prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. There, bowed down beneath the weight of our transgressions, His soul was exceeding sorrowful even unto death. There He prayed fervently,—“Abba, Father, all things are possible unto Thee; take away this cup from Me: nevertheless not what I will, but what Thou wilt.” Twice again does He pray the same words, yet not altogether the same. There is a shade of difference, though still the human will of our Lord shrinks from that which lies before Him. Now it is—“O my Father, if this cup may not pass from Me, except I drink it, Thy will be done.”

But now after the thrice-offered prayer, after the strength imparted by the angel, the victory is fully won. There is no more shrinking. The human will of the Son is lost in the Divine will of the Father. There come the crowd of soldiers and servants, with swords and staves, lanterns and torches. Jesus rebukes the rashness of Peter in drawing the sword, and declares His perfect willingness to suffer and to die: "Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which My Father hath given Me shall I not drink it?"

O let me consider well the contents of that cup of which Jesus drank.

Every bitter ingredient was there, none was wanting. What bodily suffering and extreme weariness through pain did He endure! No limb of His sacred body but had a share in the agony He bore.

Beyond this, what grief did He endure in the base ingratitude of a people whose every want and sorrow He had been ready to relieve! What desolation of heart did He experience through the treachery of Judas, the denial of Peter, the desertion of the rest of His disciples! What pangs must have rent His spirit when upon the cross He heard the reproaches that were cast

upon Him ! What darkness of soul did He pass through when He uttered the cry, " My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me ? "

Who can express, who can fathom one of these depths of untold woe ?

Let me consider too the object of our Lord in drinking this cup.

Was it not that He might taste death for every man ? Was it not that He might empty at one draught that cup of wrath, which I and all others must for ever have been drinking and yet never have exhausted ?

O blessed Jesus, in Thy wondrous love Thou hast taken the poison that Thou mayest give to me the cup of salvation. Thou hast drained to the very dregs that cup in which was the curse due to my sin, that Thou mayest give to me the cup of blessing, of peace, of everlasting life. To my lips dost Thou now hold the cup which is full to the brim of everlasting consolation. Thou dost give me Thy word so rich in promise and in hope. Thou dost grant to me in overflowing abundance pardoning mercy which can cover all mine iniquity. Thou dost hold out to me the assurance that my strength shall be equal to my day, and that Thy Spirit shall prepare me for

Thy presence in glory. Oh, how can I thank Thee enough for all this love of Thine!

And now what is my cup of sorrow or suffering compared to Thine? Thou, the sinless one, for me didst drink the cup which was all bitterness; I, the sinful one, have my cup of trial mingled with so many mercies, so many alleviations. If I have pain and weariness to bear, have I not seasons of rest? have I not the aid of medicine, and skilful advice to promote my recovery or to lessen my sufferings? Have I not those about me who love to minister to my wants? Have I not kind affection to be as a gleam of sunshine in the darkness? or at least have I not His presence with me, who has promised that He will be my Eternal Refuge, and underneath shall be His everlasting arms? And is it not a Father's hand that gives the cup? And may I not thus know that love hath prepared it? "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth."

And surely I need it, as the draught of healing, to cure the deep-rooted maladies of my soul.

Is there no pride in me that needs to be subdued, that I may be as a little child, content to be led by a Father's hand? Is there not too

much readiness to hearken to the syren voice of man's praise, that needs to be cast out that I may seek only the praise that cometh from above? Is there not too much carefulness as to this world's business and duties that requires so to be brought under that I may realize continually that one thing is needful,—to walk with God and to seek first His kingdom and righteousness? Is there not too frequent forgetfulness of the Best Friend that must be so overcome that Jesus must be all my salvation and all my desire?

And what will teach me these precious lessons if it be not the days of adversity and trial? These cheerless and desolate days, these hours of bitter tears come not by chance, but are sent us in faithfulness and love.

They come to lay us lowly, and humbled in the dust,
All self-deception swept away, all creature-hope and trust;
Our helplessness, our vileness, our guiltiness to own,
And flee for hope and refuge to Christ, and Christ alone.

They come to draw us nearer to our Father and our Lord,
More earnestly to seek His face, to listen to His word,
And to feel, if now around us a desert land we see,
Without the star of promise, what would its darkness be!

We might take a very homely illustration of God's purpose in chastening His people. In

agricultural districts it is very common after harvest to hear the burring sound of the threshing machine, and in passing by the allotment or cottage garden, to see the corn spread out and the labourer beating out the grain. Remember that affliction is God's flail ; it is God's threshing season. The very word "tribulation" has this meaning. It is taken from a Latin word signifying the wagon or roller with which the ancients beat out their corn. But doth the husbandman hate his corn, or wish to destroy it, because he violently inflict upon it blow after blow, or cast it into the machine where the beaters act upon it with like effect ? Nothing of the kind. It is very precious in his eyes. It is that for which he has toiled many an hour. Then why doth he thus act ? It is to separate the precious from the vile ; it is to cleanse the grain from all that encumbers it. And is it not thus in God's dealings with His wheat ? He will not by chastening inflict injury, but benefit. He doth not hate His people because He chastises them, for they are very dear to Him ; and He declares that those whom He loves He rebukes and chastens. And all the fruit of His work upon them is to take away their sin ; to purify them from all

that is evil, and to make them meet for the heavenly garner.

And it is well for us to bear in mind that in no way is God more glorified, and the souls of others benefitted than by the patient endurance of His people in trial.

Perhaps you may be ready to repine at a period of apparent uselessness being allotted to you; were you able actively to labour in the vineyard, you may imagine that you might do far more good than it is possible for you to do now. You may say to yourself—"The cup of suffering which Christ drank brought great blessings to the world, but what good to any one can come about through my affliction?" Now it is certain that we can judge very little indeed about a matter like this. God's ways are not our ways. By the most likely means a very small amount of good may be effected, whilst by means we have never thought of, He may bring great glory to Himself and good to man.

An aged clergyman was accustomed for many years to visit a long confirmed invalid, who patiently bore up under great suffering. "I wonder why God keeps me here," she would say: "I can do no good to any one." "Yes, God has a work

for you to do." "Impossible! I never see any one." "Yes, God uses the weakest instrument, and you may be able to teach me." "Well, then," she replied, "I am willing to suffer as long as God pleases." And so it happened as her pastor had said. During the long illness which preceded his death, he remarked that he knew not how he could have borne the pain had it not been for the remembrance of the meekness and submission which that Christian woman had displayed.

A similar example might be found in the account that has been given of the farewell counsels of an eminent French pastor. During his last illness he assembled in his chamber from Sunday to Sunday a few Christian people, and, in the midst of extreme weakness and suffering, gave them the fruits of his own ripened experience. Perhaps never during his whole ministry did his words make so deep an impression, and "The Adieu of Adolphe Monod" have likewise brought a message of consolation to many a one in our own land.

Besides, however, the way in which God often employs the weakness and suffering of His servants to effect a work for His name, it is to be remembered also that He often uses it as a pre-

paration, that when the season of affliction has passed His servant may be able the better to teach and comfort others. Lessons practically learnt for the first time in the day of sorrow may be intended for the benefit not only of the sufferer himself, but also for very many besides in future years. It is not too much to say that the ministry which has often been most richly blest has received its tone and character from trials which seemed at the time almost unbearable.

A few lines from a Persian poet very beautifully set forth the benefit of trial to those who have God's work to do :—

When Allah makes choice of a man to fulfil
The plans of His mighty, inscrutable will,
He darkens His pathway with failure and care,
To teach him how worthless his energies are ;
And how useless and vain all his efforts must prove,
Save a guardian Almighty looks down from above.

But when pride is confounded and hope seems o'erthrown,
And his heart sinks to struggle unfriended and lone,
Then Allah comes forth, in that terrible hour
Re-awakens his courage and clothes him with power !
The creature is powerless to help or sustain,
'Tis Allah makes dark, and 'tis Allah makes plain.

Hence, reader, in every trying hour strive in the strength of Jesus, in the might of His Spirit,

meekly to bow beneath your Father's hand, yea, even to kiss the hand that presents the bitter cup.

Even if bending o'er the grave that contains the earthly tabernacle of the one dearest to you in the world, even though mourning the loss of all that makes life pleasant or desirable to you, even though passing through weeks or months of agonizing pain, even though all your plans have failed, all your prospects blighted, all you once possessed lost beyond recovery, yet even then, think of Calvary ; think of the pitiful love of your Father ; think of the gracious purpose of these afflictions ; think of that pearl of great price, of which none can rob you ; think of that Home where an hour with your God will make up for it all : then try, try again and again, from your heart to utter the words, Thy will be done ! "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it ? "

Whate'er Thy sovereign will denies,
I calmly would resign ;
For Thou art good, and just, and wise :
O bend my will to Thine.

Whate'er Thy sacred will ordains,
O give me strength to bear ;
Still let me know my Father reigns,
And trust a Father's care.

XII.

The Piercing of Jesus's Side.

And one of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side, and forthwith came there out blood and water.—JOHN xi. 34.

ONE tree has been the channel of all the evil, and another of all the good that is to be found in the world. From the fruit of the tree of which Eve partook has arisen all the sin, care, sorrow, disease, and death that are to be seen on every side. From the fruit of another tree, that on which Jesus bore our sins, has arisen all the grace, holiness, hope and consolation, which the Church hath received from above. Oh, that we might gaze upon that cross, and in faith behold Him who hung there ! O blessed Redeemer, send upon us the Spirit of grace and supplications, that we may look upon Thee whom our sins have pierced, and mourn ; that we may again look upon Thee, and rejoice in such a loving Saviour, in such a blood-bought salvation !

Reader, go nigh to that cross. As John and
the faithful women stood beneath its shadow, so
do you likewise go and behold the Lamb of God
that taketh away the sin of the world.

Behold that head, lately anointed with fragrant
natenard, now encircled with a chaplet of sharp
orns!

Behold that face, fairer than the children of
men, upon which angels delighted to gaze,
covered with mingled blood and sweat!

Behold that eye, which beheld the city with
such compassion, which shed tears over it, as at
the tomb of Bethany, now growing dim in death!

Behold those ears, which never in vain heard
the cry of sorrow or distress, now greeted with
utter mockings and reproaches!

Behold those lips, which spake as never man
spake, which said to the widow, "Weep not,"
and to the waves, "Peace, be still," now swollen
with blows and parched with thirst!

Behold those hands, which healed the leper by
their touch, which lifted up the daughter of
Jairus and restored her to life, now torn by nails!

Behold those feet, which ever went about doing
good, which trod the waves of Genessaret, now
more wounded, and painfully fixed!

Behold that body, so holy, so chaste, so suffering unknown agonies !

And now behold the heart of Jesus, so true and true, so kind and loving, pierced with soldier's spear ! Ah, it was a rude, cruel wound that inflicted this last wound on the body of Lord ! There was no need for it. The Spirit of the Redeemer had fled. His enemies had their worst. He could no longer suffer pain or grief. But that spear-wound was, as it were, a mark of the hatred which still existed against the Crucified. Deeply too must that wide wound from which flowed forth blood and water, reach to the heart of John and the women who yet stood by.

What does that spear, that pierced heart tell of man's sin in all periods of the world's history ?

How many are there, like that soldier, who wound afresh the crucified Redeemer ! but this doth he that persecutes, hinder, scoffs at the Lord's people ? Said not Christ to him who had been the persecutor of His Church ? “ Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me ? ”

What but this doth the blasphemer, the gatekeeper, the Sabbath-breaker, and the like, who

his daring iniquity openly proclaimeth his rejection of Christ?

What but this doth he that denies the atonement, thus endeavouring to make void the purpose for which Christ died?

What but this doth the inconsistent professor, who bears the Saviour's name, and yet by his life brings dishonour upon it?

Yea, and let every Christian look at his own sin, and see how it hath wounded his Lord. Surely it hath been as the scourge, the nail, the spear. It hath increased the burden of guilt which He bore; it hath added to the sufferings which He endured. How utterly should we loathe and forsake the sin that wrought the death and shame of our best Friend!

A Red Indian was persuaded, sorely against his will, to murder a dear friend who was kinsman to a man that had killed one of his own tribe. After he had done the deed a terrible remorse seized him. He took the knife which he had used, and having dug a deep hole on the north side of a tree, he threw it in that he might never see it more, and that it might lie beneath a spot upon which the sun would never shine.

Let me ever thus regard my sin! It is that

which hath wounded the One that bore me nothing but good will, and that ever sought my peace. It is that which hath slain my Friend, my Saviour, my Redeemer. May I ever regard it as an accursed thing ! May I never more look upon it with favour, but with the utmost abhorrence. May I keep far away, shrinking from its very touch as the deadliest pollution !

Ah, give me, Lord, the tender heart
That trembles at the approach of sin :
A godly fear of sin impart,
Implant and root it deep within ;
That I may fear Thy gracious power,
And never dare to offend Thee more.

But what doth that spear-wound tell of mercy,
grace, and salvation ?

Here in the riven side of Christ is the cleft of the rock, the safe hiding place, whither the sinner may flee and find rest and safety. In every accusation of conscience abide here, for "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." In every season of doubt or anxiety you may repose here, for Christ hath said, "In Me ye shall have peace." In all the storms of affliction that may fall upon you, in the burning heat of noon, the wearing toil and

hurry of life's work, you may in a moment find consolation by turning to the Saviour ; for it is written, "A man shall be as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest ; as rivers of water in a dry place ; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." Whenever the Adversary tempts or affrights you, whenever you experience unkindness or injurious treatment at the hands of others, flee again and again to Christ as the refuge of your soul. A story is told of a dove pursued by a hawk that flew into the breast of one who was walking over a field. He looked tenderly upon the bird fluttering with terror, and said to it, "I will not give thee up to thine enemy, since thou comest to me for sanctuary." Even so may the soul, terrified by the assaults of the Evil One, or harassed by the persecutions of the world, flee straight to the Friend of sinners with the prayer, "O deliver not the soul of Thy turtle dove unto the multitude of the enemies."

But St. John tells us that from the side of Christ there flowed water and blood. It affords a testimony to the accuracy of the narrative, for we are told that long-continued agony such as Jesus had suffered has a tendency to produce a quantity of water around the heart.

It affords also an illustration of those streams of salvation that come to us through the Savior's crucifixion. It shadows forth the blessings that follow from His death. It tells of the blood that cleanseth from all sin. It tells of the fountain open, and open for you. Are you just waking from the sleep of sin, from a life-time of indifference to the service of God? The message is to you: "Wash, and be clean." Are you a backslider? Have you turned away from Christ? Do you feel as if such sin could never be forgiven? Despair not. True you have brought dishonor upon His name; you have said in fact to those around you, "I have tried the world, and I have tried Christ, and the world is the best master." Yet once again turn back to Him. He will pardon. "Wash, and be clean."

Are you a believer clinging only to Jesus, yet distressed on account of your manifold infirmities? Here is your safety, here is your comfort; a continual resort to the fountain. Close by it is the only place on earth where every sin withers and dies, and where grace and holiness and love thrive and grow. For with the efficacy of His blood to cleanse, doth Jesus ever join the power of the Spirit,

living water, to renew and sanctify. You cannot separate them. "The water and the blood" will ever flow on together. Both are given through Christ's meritorious cross and passion. And He gives not one without the other. Grace to forgive, and grace to sanctify,—both or neither will Jesus bestow.

For both wait upon Him continually. As you look to Him daily to wash you from your sins in His own blood, so likewise look to Him every hour for fresh supplies of His quickening, sanctifying Spirit.

We believe that Thou shalt come to be our Judge.

We therefore pray Thee help Thy servants whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy most precious blood.

Make them to be numbered with Thy saints in glory everlasting.

Flow, my tears, flow still faster,
Thus my guilt and sin bemoan ;
Mourn, my heart, in deeper anguish,
Over sorrows not thine own !
See a spotless Lamb draw nigh
To Jerusalem, to die
For thy sins : the sinless One.
Think ! ah, think ! what thou hast done !

Can we view the Saviour given
To the smiter's hands for us ?
Can we all unmoved, unhumbled,
See Him mocked and slighted thus,—
View the thorny chaplet made
For His meek and silent head,—
Hear the loud and angry din,
And not tremble for our sin ?

Must I, Jesus, thus behold Thee
In Thy toil and sorrow here ?
Can I nothing better yield Thee
Than my unavailing tear ?
Lamb of God ! I weep for Thee !
Weep, Thy cruel cross to see,—
Weep, for death that death destroys !
Weep, for grief that brings me joys !

Poor is all that I can offer :
Soul and body while I live ;
Take it, O my Saviour, take it,—
I have nothing more to give.
Come, and in this heart remain,
Let each enemy be slain,—
Let me live and die with Thee ;
To Thy kingdom welcome me.

XIII.

Christ hath Risen.

And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye : for I know that ye seek Jesus which was crucified. He is not here ; for He is risen, as He said. Come see the place where the Lord lay.—MATT. xxviii. 5, 6.

MANY a day hath dawned in joy and prosperity that hath set in darkness and despair. The unexpected letter, the untimely accident, the unlooked for disappointment, hath darkened the sky, and changed in a moment the whole aspect of life. But there is sometimes the reverse of this ; the day that hath opened in gloom and fear hath closed in gladness and hope. It was thus on the day when Christ arose. When it dawned love and piety were awake and busy, but faith and hope and joy seemed well nigh dead. The godly women come to the grave. They had gazed on the Cross, they had watched by the sepulchre, they had gone to their homes with hearts still set upon honouring their Lord, and

now, awake before sunrise, they come to anoint with the spices which they had prepared the body of Him they loved. Chief amongst them came she whom Christ had so marvellously delivered from the tyranny of the powers of darkness. Ah, Mary Magdalene, I admire and would copy, if I might, that holy flame of love which burnt so brightly in thy breast! Thy heart is fast bound to thy Saviour! Whether He be on the cross or in the grave, still thou wilt be there. Like Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, so faithfully watching by the bodies of her sons, so wilt thou watch by the grave of thy Lord.

Yet would I chide thee for thine unbelief. The very enemies of thy Lord remember His words, that He hath promised to rise again the third day, and hast thou forgotten them? Hast thou forgotten the triumphs of Nain and Bethany? Hast thou forgotten that thrice at His bidding death hath loosened his iron grasp, and shall it now retain its hold of the Prince of Life?

Truly there was unbelief in Mary, yet what Christian sees not in her his own photograph? When the crisis of danger approaches, when the clouds hang the heaviest, who remembers as he

ought the words of Christ ? Who relies as he ought on His faithfulness and power ?

Those godly women hasten to the sepulchre, though they fear whether their journey be not in vain. They remember the large stone, and ask who shall roll it away from the door of the sepulchre. Yet they turn not back because of the difficulty that lies in their path. They hold on their way in seeking their Lord. But now a fresh sorrow, a fresh perplexity befalls them. The stone is gone, but the grave is empty ! Whilst unbelief reigns it will always be thus. Fresh impediments will continually arise, and how shall we overcome them unless we can rely upon the word of the Lord ? But now the light begins to burst. The Lord despiseth not those that are weak in faith, and will surely strengthen and encourage them. Now He sends two messengers from the upper world. They speak to the sorrowing women and bid them not be afraid. Why shall they fear, for their crucified Lord is not there, for He hath risen from the dead ?

And you, seekers after Jesus, why should you fear ? You may seek for a while in sorrow, you may find the stone still left to try your faith, you may have to mourn your great temptations

or your cold and stubborn heart, yet wait on the Lord and He will guide and comfort you. Some bright angel of mercy, some gracious providence or some sweet promise shall remove the stone; the joy and peace which to your eyes has seemed for ever buried and lost beyond all recovery, shall yet live again, and cheer you with its gladness.

And whilst we watch the light grows brighter. Those angels have been as the morning star, or the first beams of day, but the sun itself now appears. Jesus Himself, that very Jesus whom the women had beheld with their own eyes nailed, pierced, groaning, dying, breathing forth His last breath in prayer, is indeed alive again! Ah, Christian, think of it! It tells of life, victory, immortality. Without question the happiness of every believer and the salvation of the whole Church is bound up in this glorious fact of our Lord's resurrection.

But who shall first recognize the Lord? To Mary is this honour granted. She knows the voice of the good Shepherd. Its tender, loving tone calling her by name, "Mary," thrills through her inmost soul. Almost unbearable must have been the joy of that moment. I wonder that she

died not of its intensity. To see again that beloved One, to feel a persuasion that she should never more lose Him as the portion of her soul,—what but the joy of the glorified could equal it? May it not have been, amongst other reasons, to calm her spirit, that Jesus forbade her to touch Him, but sent her forth to tell the disciples of His resurrection, and to foretell His ascension to the Father?

The other women also see His face and hear His voice. Faithful above all others when He bore the cross, they are honoured in being the first who are permitted to worship Him after His resurrection. Often has woman been pre-eminent in evil or in good. Was not Eve the first who disobeyed the command of God, and from a sinner became a tempter? Did not the wife of the patriarch of Uz bid him curse God and die? Is there a name in Scripture from which we shrink with greater abhorrence than Jezebel, the woman that stirred up Ahab, her husband, to the commission of such terrible crimes?

And, on the other hand, are there any whose names are more worthy of honour than Ruth and Hannah and Deborah, and the three Marys, each of whom so truly loved the Lord?

Ah, why should not those by nature endowed with tenderest affection, with gentlest feeling, with warmest love, pour it out upon the Saviour who best deserves it ?

But others also behold their risen Lord. He is seen of Simon, and the disciples on the way to Emmaus, and the ten in the upper chamber. Beside this, we hear of His appearing to James, and to the disciples on the Sea of Tiberias, and on one occasion to more than five hundred brethren at once.

There should be no room left for doubt as to the great fact upon which the eternal peace of the whole Church depended. The unbelief of the disciples, the message of the angels, the efforts of His enemies, His many appearances, and that to so many persons during a period of forty days, the chain of consequences reaching down to the present hour and which cannot in any reasonable way be separated from the Lord's resurrection, all these bear a united testimony, than which it is hard to conceive any that could possibly be stronger.

And what practical instruction may we gain from the resurrection of Christ ?

It tells us that the words of Jesus are sure and faithful and true. Whether He were a "deceiver," as His enemies affirmed, or whether He were indeed the truth, was the point at issue. And God plainly declared the latter. He set His seal to every word that Christ had taught when He raised Him from the dead on the third day. Reader, believe it, Jesus is true. Hearken not to the unbelief that spreads far and wide, denying one by one every precious truth upon which our salvation depends. Hearken not to the suggestions of doubt and uncertainty which would rob you of all solid peace. Read the sayings of Jesus, receive them with all meekness and confidence, and rejoice that whilst Heaven and earth shall pass away, not one word of His can possibly fail.

It tells also of the complete satisfaction made to the law of God by the death of our Surety.

When Jesus undertook to bear our guilt and to pay our ransom, the hand of Divine Justice laid hold upon Him, nailing Him to the cross, and then bringing Him to the silent grave. But now we see Him rising superior to the power of death and the grave ; no more is He seen the bleeding, suffering, dying victim, but the glorious

Redeemer, who hath burst the bonds of the grave and lives to die no more. What a joyful message doth this bring to the self-accusing conscience! In deep self-abasement do you own and confess your sin? Do you venture into the Lord's presence with the plea that whatever be your sin, the death of Christ may answer for it, that His wounds may be your healing, His precious blood your cleansing? Then the resurrection of Christ tells you that you stand clear before God.

The Father bore witness that the debt was paid, the guilt expiated, the satisfaction made ample and sufficient. Hence you are free. It would be unjust that the same offence should twice receive the punishment allotted. Your sin hath once been punished in your Surety, hence it can never be exacted of you. Jesus had no more to suffer, so neither have you. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit."

The resurrection of Christ tells also of a final victory over death and the grave. As yet death reigns over mankind. It reigns over the bodies of all living. No sooner do men begin to live

they begin to die. The seeds of corruption dissolution abide within us and will one day g us to the dust. It reigns at ten thousand h-scenes. Could we go the wide world ; what myriads should we continually find ing into the power of the grim foe. It ns within numberless cities of the dead. churchyards and cemeteries still bear wit to its terrible might. It reigns over many lain where battles have been fought, and eath which lie the bones of those who fell a. It reigns over the ocean, for within capacious bosom still remain those that for erations have found a watery grave. Death ns, but not for ever. The prey shall be taken i the mighty, and the spoil from the strong. we hearken to the voice of those that know the story of the resurrection, the lament over grave is cheerless and painful indeed. A then poet could write thus :—

The sun that sets again will rise,
And give the day and gild the skies :
But when we lose our little light,
We sleep in everlasting night.

I another in the same strain :—

But we, or great, or wise, or brave,
Once dead and silent in the grave,
Senseless remain. One rest we keep ;
One long, eternal, unawakened sleep.

But not so are we taught in the Gospel of Christ. Blessed be God for the hope of life and immortality ! If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. He will swallow up death victory, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces. This corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality. And then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, " Death is swallowed up in victory." And what glory awaits the righteous in the risen body. Dark and terrible indeed is the future before those who have died in their sins ; no more fearful words are to be found within the compass of Scripture than those of our Lord, " The resurrection of damnation." But very blessed and very glorious will be " the resurrection of life." Two images are given of it,—the stars by night and the sun by day. What an idea of calm rest, of fixity and permanence, of distance from all the turmoil and trouble of the present scene, is connected

with the former. What surpassing brilliancy do we behold in the latter. And both are employed to set forth the excellencies of Christ. (See Mal. v. 2. Rev. xxii. 16.) In the future life of the believer, all this will be combined. It will be rest, a shining forth in glory, a likeness in body and soul to the glorified Redeemer, and all his abiding as Eternity. (See Daniel xii. 3, and Matt. xiii. 43.)

Reader, may it be thine own! And if you would have it so, live now a risen life in Christ. Many dig their own grave and are content to lie in it. They bury themselves in a spirit of worldly carefulness, or in earthly lusts and passions, or in a golden coffin of hoarded wealth, or in a life-long indifference to spiritual religion. And so they live, and so they die, and discover too late that they are for ever undone. Oh, be not like such. Be in earnest for the world to come. Come forth from your hiding-place. Seek in Christ the power to live a new life, even the power of His quickening Spirit. "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."

XIV.

Joy in Christ's Ascension.

And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God.—*Luke xxiv. 51—53.*

THERE was great difference in the two partings between Christ and His little flock. At the first parting, when the Saviour was crucified, there was nothing but grief and bitter lamentation: “Ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice.” Even so it was. “As they mourned and wept,” Mary Magdalene brought to them the first tidings of the resurrection. At the second parting however, when Jesus was taken up into heaven, there was joy, deep joy, abiding joy.

The disciples went back from Bethany with hearts uplifted with gladness and praise. It was tidings of “great joy” that the angel brought

when Jesus had descended from above and had become incarnate ; it was likewise with "great joy" that those who had been with Christ returned to Jerusalem after they had seen Him go back into heaven.

And this joy abides until now. The thought of our Lord's ascension ministers everlasting consolation to His people. Especially may it cheer the hearts of those who are deprived of the joy of meeting in the Sanctuary with the Lord's people, and of those who are passing through seasons of anxiety or suffering.

There is a joy in the thought that all the days of our Lord's conflict are over, and that He hath already entered upon His glorious reward.

Much did it cost Him we love to purchase our salvation. Hard toil, deep humiliation, unexampled suffering in body, soul and spirit, did He endure that He might befriend fallen man. But now it is over. No longer doth He bear the shame and the curse, but having won the victory He hath taken His place at the Father's right hand, and receives the homage and the worship that are justly His due. If we truly love the Saviour, shall we not rejoice in this ? If one very dear to you had been passing through deep

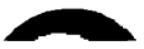
waters, could you fail to rejoice when the season of trial was over, and the friend you loved were again in peace and prosperity ? How then can we enough lift up our hearts in praise that our Friend, the Friend of sinners, is now in His glory in the highest heaven ?

But there is joy in this also, that the ascension of Christ gives a clearness, a stronger reality to the believer's hopes of a better home.

There is ever in the heart of man a tendency to cleave to that which is seen and temporal, and cast aside all thought of a higher and nobler state. Not a few in our day openly discard all consideration of another world, as that of which nothing for a certainty can be known, and boast that they care only to make the best of the present.

But our Father in heaven would have it far otherwise. Therefore hath He given the world proof from time to time that there is a better country after which we should seek.

In the days before the flood He took away Enoch from an ungodly generation, and translated him without death ; thus giving to the men of that age a testimony that there was indeed a reward for the righteous.



In the degenerate days of the kings of Israel, when true piety was well-nigh extinct, God again repeats this testimony. Elijah, the man of God, the fearless confessor of Jehovah's name on Mount Carmel, is taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire.

Then at last, in the days of the Gospel, one far greater than Enoch or Elijah, God's well-beloved Son, having accomplished the work for which He came down amongst men, returns to receive again the glory which He had with the Father before the world was. Ever since has the Church confessed it in her creed: "He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty."

Have we not in these three ascensions, more especially in that of Christ, God's own witness *in act* to the declaration of His word, "that there remaineth a rest for the people of God"?

But in the ascension of Christ, to believers there is much more than this. If you are Christ's, it is a pledge that you shall enter that rest. He enters not heaven simply as the glorified Son of God, but as the Head, the representative of His redeemed people; opening as it were the door, by which the very least of His

saints shall surely follow: "When Thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death, Thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers." He hath entered within the veil as our "for-runner." Mark the expression. It is a very suggestive one. A valuable property (including house and lands) in a distant country has been left to a family. The father goes at once to take possession, to prepare their home, and then promises to come back for his wife and children. Such a one is a *forrunner*. Even so hath Jesus gone before. He hath taken possession on behalf of His people. He hath gone to prepare a place for them. And He will return and take them to Himself, that where He is there may they be also.

Christian, rejoice here. Jesus cannot forget you. Though in His glory, He thinks of you continually and anticipates the time when you shall be with Him. Think you that the loving husband would be satisfied to enjoy by himself alone the home which his care and affection had provided for his wife and little ones? Surely he would not. Nor will Jesus forget His spouse, the Church, now tarrying in this evil world, but will in due time take her to share His glory and

His kingdom. Yea, and every desire in your heart towards Him, every pulse of love, every act of affiance in Him, may testify that by and by you shall be with Him.

And when I'm to die,
Receive me, I'll cry,
For Jesus hath loved me—I cannot tell why ;
But this I can find,—
To Him I'm so joined,
He wont be in glory, and leave me behind.

And be it remembered for our consolation also that Jesus hath ascended to bestow those gifts which prepare His people for their future glory.

“Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive : Thou hast received gifts for men ; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them.” “Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.”

“It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you ; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you.”

O then, poor and needy one, who canst discern in thyself nothing but thy sin, who to thine own eye art lacking in all that would fit thee

for the Father's house, behold thy Saviour exalted to the throne, stretching out both hands full of precious gifts for all who wait upon Him.

Dost thou need a tender conscience, a heart that will grieve for sin ? He giveth repentance. Dost thou need the blotting out of sins and iniquities beyond all reckoning ? He bestoweth a frank, complete, everlasting forgiveness through His perfected atonement. Dost thou need grace to pray, and grace to love, grace to be diligent in work and patient in suffering, grace to watch against sin, and yet after a fall never to despair, but to arise again with fresh purpose of heart, —for all this Jesus will send to thee the Holy Ghost the Comforter, and in His might you shall go from strength to strength till you appear in Zion before God. Oh, what a gracious benefactor, how rich in every needful gift, is our exalted Redeemer !

There is one special duty that arises from the consideration of our Lord's ascension. If Jesus be in heaven, where should the hearts of His servants be ? "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your

affection on things above, not on things on earth." O shame upon every one of us that our thoughts are so buried in the perishing things of the world ! Why are we so taken up with our little cares, or even our heavier crosses, or our daily duties, that we so seldom lift up our eye heavenward and behold our Friend, so ready to aid us by His counsel and strength ? Why doth the prospect of a little present gratification so soon draw the heart away from Him who is the source of endless joy ?

How many who have known something of the blessedness of following Christ, or at least have been led to desire His salvation, have been thus turned aside to their everlasting destruction. A story is told of an eagle passing over one of the Irish lakes. It was soaring upward toward the sun, but its eye fell upon the body of some dead animal floating on the water. It was arrested in its course, and lighted upon the body. What was the result ? It was in the depth of winter, the water froze upon its wing, it could no longer fly upward, so that it was caught and destroyed. The lesson is not far to seek. "Demas hath forsaken Me, having loved this present world." "Whose end is destruction, whose God

is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame,
who mind earthly things."

Reader, watch against this dangerous snare. Give not your heart even to lawful enjoyments, but reserve it for Christ. Thankfully use in their right measure the blessings that God confers, but strive evermore to rise above them and hold communion with your Lord.

Neither let anxiety about health or friends or circumstances keep you from frequent meditation on Him who sitteth above the waterfloods and permits every trial that it may speed you on your heavenward way.

O our only Hope and Guide,
Never leave us nor forsake ;
Keep us ever by Thy side,
Till the eternal morning break :
Moving on to Zion's hill
Homeward still.

Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that like as we do believe Thy only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to have ascended into the heavens ; so we may also in heart and mind thither ascend, and with Him continually dwell, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

XV.

Our Exalted King.

The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at my right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool.—PSALM cx. i.

JESUS is King. All power is given to Him, both in heaven and earth. At His ascension He was exalted to the Father's right hand, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world but also in that which is to come. The angels greet Him with a joyful welcome : “ Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in.” Then was fulfilled the prophecy uttered by the Psalmist : “ The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at my right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool.”

A deep importance attaches to this passage. It is no less than four times referred to in the New Testament. It manifests clearly the Divine

nature of our Lord. He who was to be David's son was also David's Lord. It manifests also the kingly majesty of Christ, and the victory ensured to Him. Calmly He sitteth above the waterfloods, there abiding near to the Father till the promised dominion shall be all His own.

Behold Christ by the power of His grace bringing those aforetime rebels and opposers in willing submission to His footstool ! His people become willing in the day of His power. Those who would once despise His authority and reject His commands learn to delight themselves in doing His will. Nor is there to be found anywhere a greater manifestation of Divine power than in this. An earthly sovereign may send forth his armies. He may defeat and scatter to the winds all that opposes his progress, he may raze to the ground the strong fortress, he may conquer and lay waste cities and provinces. But Jesus can do that which is mightier far. For what is the strongest thing on earth ? Leaving out of sight what grace can effect, I would answer, assuredly the strongest thing is *a rebellious human will*. How fortified is it by all the craft and malice of the invisible foe, how strong is it to resist mercies, and judgments, the terrors of the

law, the warnings of conscience, the invitations of the Gospel ! Yet there is One stronger. Jesus can subdue this rebel will. His Spirit can wrest the captive out of the power of the Evil One. He can change the daring rebel into the loyal devoted subject of the King of kings. See the thief on the cross confessing his sin, and owning the Kingly power of Jesus when all else seemed to have doubted it. See the many thousands who shortly afterwards cast away their deep-rooted prejudice and submit to the sway of the Nazarene. See the very ringleader of the persecuting Jews, whilst his heart was full of rage against Christ and His people, arrested and brought low, so that Saul the Pharisee becomes Paul the chiefest of apostles.

Take also an instance of later times. An old Hindoo, formerly almost worshipped by his disciples, though his life was stained by unnumbered crimes, was by the Spirit convinced of sin, and became so truthful, so honest, so full of love and kindness that he became an honour to the Church of Christ in India. After ten years of faithful service he was called to his rest. A few weeks before his death he said to those around him, "I have two requests to make to you : first,

that you will pray for me that the Lord may soon receive me into His kingdom; and secondly, that next Sunday before the whole congregation that you will offer up thanksgivings and praises to the Lord Jesus, that in His boundless mercy He has taken me, the vilest of the vile and the most abandoned sinner, out of the world, uniting me with His Church, making me one of His own. What boundless grace and mercy! Yea, yea, Jesus, Thou art my Saviour, my all in all!"

Let the Christian away with the thought that any on earth are beyond the reach of Christ's arm. Only bring to the feet of our King those for whose souls you care. There plead for them. Slack not faith and prayer. Rely upon the omnipotence of His grace, and His declared goodwill towards the guilty and the lost. Then tarry the Lord's leisure, and, it may be, far beyond your expectation will He put forth His saving power.

But we are also to look up and behold our King in His own time putting beneath His feet all that opposeth His rule. If you be one of His, it shall be so with the enemies that disturb your peace.

Because you are knit to Him, He reckons your enemies to be His enemies, and as such

will He deal with them. Joshua brought the kings out of the cave, and bade his men of war put their feet on their necks, for thus should the Lord do to all those against whom they fought. Thus doth Jesus with you. Doth the wily foe harass and disturb you? Doth much evil still dwell within you? Do you find impatience arise under suffering, wandering imaginations in the hour of prayer, inward corruptions resisting the law of the Spirit, distrust and unbelief at times prevailing against you? These are Christ's enemies, as they are yours, and He will surely give you the dominion over them.

Likewise shall He remove whatever else mars your peace and comfort. All the works of the devil, all the fruits of sin,—pain, sorrow, disease and death,—these too shall He put beneath His feet.

But look the wide world round and see how full it is as yet of the enemies of Christ. Consider the false religions which overspread the earth's surface. What a company would it form if you could gather together all the priests and teachers of the various systems that oppose Christianity. What myriads would there be of Brahmins, Buddhist priests, Devil priests and the like. Consider

likewise the infidelity that abounds, denying at one time the truth of the Pentateuch, at another the inspiration of St. John's Gospel or the reality of our Lord's miracles. Add moreover the fearful errors of professing Christendom. What gross iniquities also prevail, and every abominable thing that the Lord hateth !

And yet in the survey of all this there is infinite consolation in the thought that the Lord reigneth, and that every evil we deplore shall at length be made to pay tribute to Him. "The Lord hath made all things for Himself, yea, even the wicked for the day of evil." It is worth remembering that the greatest error in religion was combined with the greatest sin that the world ever witnessed, and yet both combined wrought out through God's mercy, the greatest blessing the world has ever received. Of course I refer to the death of Christ. His enemies thought of Him as a blasphemer, so greatly did they err ; with wicked hands they crucified the Lord of glory, so greatly did they sin ; and yet through that death which Jesus thus accomplished doth He save the souls of all His believing people.

Only wait then till Jesus our King returns openly to take the kingdom. The Captain of our

salvation will then give to His Church a glorious triumph. He will bring good out of every evil that now burdens our world. Every idol shall then fall, every false religion shall be forsaken, every persecutor of the Church shall be ashamed, every sceptic shall believe, every error and sin shall be cast down. Yea, Satan and all his emissaries shall be confounded and overthrown for ever, and the reign of Emmanuel shall be the more glorious for the evils that have preceded it.

Is Jesus exalted to reign for ever ? then let us ask, Who is on the Lord's side ? Reader, have you yielded yourself to Him ? Do you so desire to be His alone, that you would have every thought, every action brought in subjection to His will ?

Bear in mind, Christ hath two rods, and by one or other of them every one, without exception, will be brought to bow before Him. The one is the rod of His loving grace, His word, His Spirit, by which He brings down high thoughts, and leads the sinner to choose His service. Oft-times for this purpose he sends, together with His word, the rod of affliction ; as it is written, "Hear ye the rod and who hath appointed it."

The other is "the rod of iron,"—the rod of His mighty power, shown not in mercy but in wrath. "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron, Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

Why not yield now to Christ, if you have not hitherto done so, that cheerful, glad obedience which His love so justly demands? Why not ask of Him both the will and strength faithfully to serve Him all the days of your life? Why not go to Him with the humble acknowledgment of former disobedience, and purposing hereafter to be His alone,—"O Lord our God, other lords beside Thee have had dominion over us; but by Thee only will we make mention of Thy name"?

But let there be no attempt at a divided service. Christ hates above all things half-heartedness and indecision. Steadfastness, boldness, determination to confess His name, to honour His truth before men, is most essential.

A few striking words of a great and good man may illustrate its necessity. Gustavus Adolphus, King of Sweden, crossed over into Germany that he might assist the Protestant princes in casting off the tyranny of the Catholic League. He was

however sorely hindered by the lukewarmness of the Duke of Saxony and the Elector of Brandenburg. Hear his bold words to the ambassador of the latter : "This I say to you plainly beforehand, I will hear and know nothing of neutrality. His highness must be friend or foe. When I come to his borders he must declare himself hot or cold. The battle is one between God and the devil. Will his highness hold with God, let him stand on my side ; if he prefer to hold with the devil, then he must fight with me. A third position will not be granted to him."

Thus spake an earthly prince. And what saith our King to those that steer a middle course, that play fast and loose with Him, that halt between two opinions ? Hearken to the word of Him who shall hereafter decide our everlasting destiny : "He that is not with Me is against Me, and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth abroad." "No man can serve two masters :.... ye cannot serve God and mammon."

Strive then to take your place as a decided, fearless, out-spoken follower of the Lamb. For this purpose rise up to enjoy closer fellowship with your exalted King. Look for more of the strengthening might of the Holy Ghost. Realize

more the power of Christ's resurrection. Depend without faltering on His faithful promise. Then stand forth boldly as His witness in the world. Whether in the sick chamber or in society, shrink not from the reproach of the cross; but ever manifest your unwavering allegiance to the King of Zion.

Ashamed of Jesus! Sooner far
Let evening blush to own her star.
No: when I blush, be this my shame,—
That I no more revere His name.

Very gracious is the Lord's promise to those that own His name, and very solemn His warning to those that deny Him. "I say unto you, whosoever shall confess Me before men, him shall the Son of Man also confess before the angels of God." "Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of Me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

XVI.

Our Melchisedek Priest.

The Lord hath sworn and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedek.—PSALM cx. 4.

JESUS centres in His own person the office both of King and Priest. Thus was He foreshadowed by Joshua the High Priest. Crowns were placed upon his head, and thus he stood as a type of Messiah. “He shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne, and he shall be a priest upon his throne.” (Zech. vi. 11—13.) In earlier days was Jesus also thus set forth in type by Melchisedek. The word Melchisedek signifies, king of righteousness; he was also king of Salem, or king of peace. He was also a priest of the the most high God.

It is in this latter character that I would now endeavour to set him before you as an eminent type of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is thus that

the Holy Spirit by the pen of David foretells the work of our Lord: "Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedek."

The idea of a priest is that of one who stands as a mediator between God and man, one who by sacrifice and intercession, can bring nigh those whom sin hath separated. Under the law we have Aaron, in the fulfilment of his office by sacrifice, by sprinkling of the blood, by pleading in the most holy place, obtaining pardon and acceptance for Israel. Thus was Aaron, as set forth in the Epistle to the Hebrews, a type of Christ in His priestly office.

But from the same Epistle we discover that in Melchisedek there was a still more remarkable setting forth of His work. In several respects was there a preeminency in Melchisedek that affords a most instructive view of the glorious priesthood of Christ.

Christ as a High Priest standeth alone. Melchisedek was not one of a line or order, but a solitary priest, as far as we can learn, without predecessor, without successor. This affords the explanation of a difficult passage in Heb. vii. He is there said to be "without father, without mother, having neither beginning of days, nor

nd of life." It is likely that the simplest interpretation is the true one. The Jewish priests ad their genealogy most carefully traced. The name of the father and mother must be given, hat their descent from Aaron might be clearly scertained. Their birth and death likewise was exactly noted down. But with Melchisedek it was otherwise. Nothing of all this is recorded. The short history given of him in Gen. xiv. is all that is left us. We are told neither of his father or his mother, of his birth or his death. He was one alone by himself.

Thus is it with Christ. He has a priesthood perfectly distinct from all others. None share with Him in carrying it forward. None succeed Him in it on earth, now that He hath passed into the heavens. We dare not for one moment couple with Him in His work of intercession, either Mary, or Joseph, or saints or angels; neither dare we suppose that His ministering servants on earth perform a like office to that which He performs above. "He hath an *unchangeable* priesthood." (Heb. vii. 24.) The word used is remarkable. It signifies "that passeth not from one to another." Therefore in the highest sense of the word,—no priest is to be

found on earth. Not one single instance is there in the New Testament of the word *priest* being applied to those who are now ambassadors for Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. And when in the Service of our own Church the minister of Christ is denominated a priest, it is only in the sense of presbyter or elder, and not in the sense of mediator or of one who offers sacrifice. Remember that in this Christ abideth alone. He alone searcheth the heart, therefore none but He can receive our confessions, or can absolve the penitent.

To Jesus only must the eye of the sinner be directed. Consider His dignity as well beloved of the Father. Consider His all-prevailing plea, His own precious blood, His all-sufficient merit. Consider His infinite tenderness and compassion: and that He is One who can sympathize in every pang that rends the heart, One who has passed through every dark chamber of trial that can be appointed for us, One who has been tempted in all things even as we are, and therefore can succour in every hour of need.

Jesus standeth alone in heaven as the one great High Priest of mankind: take care, my fellow sinner, that He standeth alone in thine heart. No

word or work, no prayer or tear, no thought or deed of thine must share with Him the glory of thy salvation. Look not to self, rely not upon the absolution pronounced by man, but from all turn to Him who is at the Father's right hand.

When the weight of a life-time's transgression lies heavy on thy conscience, behold Him as thine Advocate, bearing still the marks of that death which atones for thy guilt. When you bend low in fervent supplication before the mercy seat, lift thine eye to Him who by His gracious mediation shall secure the success of every petition. When the end draws near, when your trembling spirit takes its flight from its earthly tabernacle, let Jesus only be the one trust, the one stay, the one resting-place of your soul.

Jesus as our High Priest comes forth to bless His people. Read the account given of Melchisedek in Genesis. As God's High Priest he pronounced a solemn benediction on the father of the faithful. Thus doth Jesus bless those that follow in Abraham's footsteps. He ever loves to bless. On the Mount of Olives he opened His mouth, saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit,"

"blessed are the meek," etc. When they brought young children to Him, He laid His hands on them and blessed them. When going back to His glory, His last act was to bless His disciples. When He had ascended, Peter declared that God still sent him to bless them in turning away every one of them from their iniquities. When He shall return again it will be still the same: "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

And who shall say how rich, how precious is the blessing that Jesus gives? It is not mere words. A friend may say, *God bless you*, but it may mean but little. But the blessing of Jesus is a reality. It goes with a man through life, it abides with him when the heart is desolate through the loss of life's companions, it forsakes him not in the chamber of suffering or in the hour of death. It disannuls the curse due to his sin, it lifts off the whole guilt of a broken law, it ensures the favour of a Father in heaven, it brings with it the grace and presence of the sanctifying Spirit, it stamps upon the soul the image of God, it opens wide to a man the gate of the everlasting city. Reader, fail not earnestly

to seek this blessing from your great High Priest. Ask it in faith, and it is yours.

The Priesthood of Christ is perpetual and abiding. "Thou art a priest *for ever* after the order of Melchisedek." "He *ever liveth* to make intercession." What a sorrow must it have been to a godly Israelite, when Aaron, or Eleazar, or some priest to whom he had often unburdened his sin or his grief was cut off by death and some stranger took his place. But our Priest abideth continually. Life's companions say good-by: those who have journeyed on with us for thirty, forty, or fifty years, leave us behind: but here is our consolation: Christ liveth and was dead and behold he is alive for evermore. Whilst we cleave to Him, we can never want a counsellor, or one who will cease to pray for us. Upon no single thing can we lay our hand and say,—"This shall be mine to-morrow." Some rough storm may come and sweep away in an hour that which most we prize. But Jesus Christ abides. The Rock of ages stands for ever.

Jesus abideth a Priest by the solemn oath of God: "The Lord *hath sworn* and will not repent.

Thou art a priest," etc. The Jewish priests were consecrated without an oath, but Christ with one, to manifest that He was the Surety of a better covenant. (See Heb. vii. 20, 22.) And how much security has the believer here! It is not only the promise, but the oath of God. It is His sure guarantee that Christ will execute His office on behalf of all who commit their souls into His hand. Here is certainty. Here is a solid resting-place for the anxious soul.

Do you tremble as you remember former iniquities? Do many doubting, fearful thoughts arise in your mind? Doth your heart suggest reasons why you will be cast off? Doth the Evil One harass you, whispering in your ear that you are not a child of God, and can never be saved? Yet whom will you believe? Your own deceitful heart? Him who was a liar from the beginning? Or the word of a faithful God? Can the oath of God be broken? Not till then can your confidence be disappointed if only you honestly confess your sin and rely on the mediation of Christ.

But we add here a word of solemn warning to those that pass by the offer of salvation in Christ, and yet hope to find mercy. The oath of God is

light to those that believe, but it is as darkness to others. What saith the oath of God to those that reject Christ? What saith God of the unbelieving Israelites? "I sware in my wrath, that they should not enter into my rest." This was true of Israel of old. The testimony of the Apostle shows that it is true now of those that believe not.

You neglect God's own appointed way of peace, you value not the blood that has been shed, you draw not near to the mercy-seat in the name of the one Priest, yet you trust that perchance after all you may find a place in the kingdom of heaven. Yet God must forfeit His own eternal truth, He must deny Himself, He must make void His own oath, if without faith in Christ you partake of His promised rest. Take heed in time. Venture not your soul's salvation on such a hope as this. Rather turn to Him who is yet willing to plead your cause: "Behold, now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation."

O Thou, the contrite sinner's Friend,
Who loving, lovest them to the end,
On this alone my hopes depend,
That Thou wilt plead for Me.

When, weary in the Christian race,
Far off appears my resting place,
And fainting I mistrust Thy grace,
Then, Saviour, plead for me.

When I have err'd and gone astray,
Afar from Thine and wisdom's way,
And see no glimmering, guiding ray,
Still, Saviour, plead for me.

When Satan, by my sins made bold,
Strives from Thy cross to loose my hold,
Then with Thy pitying arms enfold
And plead, O plead for me.

And when my dying hour draws near,
Darken'd with anguish, pain, and fear,
Then to my fainting sight appear,
Pleading in heaven for me.

When the full light of heavenly day
Reveals my sins in dread array,
Say Thou hast wash'd them all away,
O say Thou plead'st for me.

XVII.

The Promise of the Comforter.

These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.—JOHN xiv. 25, 26. (Compare 16, 17; also xv. 26; xvi. 7—15.)

THE consolation of His people is one chief purpose for which God hath given to us the revelation of His Word. He hath inspired His servants to write them, that we “through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” He hath confirmed His promise by an oath, that “we might have strong consolation.” Hence the Father is spoken of as “the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort;” the Son is sent “to comfort all that mourn,” and He bears the name of “the Consolation of Israel.” And so likewise the Holy Spirit is named the Comforter, and in a part of Scripture to which the Christian almost invariably turns in the day of trouble, no less

than five times is the promise made that the Comforter shall abide with the Lord's people. In the 14th and following chapters of this Gospel our Lord repeatedly bids His people wait for the aid of His Spirit. And why is this? Is it not because all the promises here made to us,—the abiding presence of the Father and the Son, the manifestation of Christ, the peace which the world giveth not,—all these can only be enjoyed as the Spirit dwells within the heart. Without His special help not one throb of spiritual life, not one holy desire, not one joyful hope, not one drawing of love, can exist within the soul. May He Himself assist our meditations, and reveal to us the fulness of His own grace and love!

The consolations of the Spirit depend much upon the fact that He is a living, personal Friend and Helper of Christ's flock. He was to take Christ's place, to be His Substitute on earth; because Christ had gone away, should He come to abide with those who would otherwise have been left comfortless. Far greater is the benefit we thus derive from Him as an Almighty, Personal Benefactor and Worker in the Church, than it would be possible to obtain from any mere gift, however precious it might be. We might imagine a man

living all alone by himself with very insufficient means for his support in some remote and solitary part of the country. Very acceptable might be a present of money, or food, or clothes, or an interesting book ; but how much more would it promote his happiness if you could send one to live with him,—a congenial companion, a kindly counsellor, a ready helper, a friend in need,—one who had both the will and the ability to supply all that was lacking. The parallel will hold in the case of the believer. He is often solitary, for his home is above, and He finds but little sympathy from many around. He is poor and needy, without any goodness or merit of his own, without wisdom and without strength. But the Spirit makes His abode with Him, imparting all that is needful, by His presence bringing sunshine into the sad and sorrowful heart.

For such a Friend how gladly should we prepare a guest-chamber and invite Him to enter. The Shunammite prepared for Elisha a little chamber on the wall, doubting not that if he would turn in thither the presence of so holy a man would bring a blessing to her household. Nor was she disappointed. Doubtless he gave her much profitable instruction ; and when the

joy of her home was gone, Elisha prayed, and her son was restored to life. And never, never will you regret opening the door of your heart to welcome the Spirit. Joys never before known will He bestow : everlasting peace shall be the fruit of His indwelling.

The term "Comforter"—Paraclete—includes the idea of help and strength afforded. A man is faint from loss of blood through some accident, a friend comes up and lends him an arm upon which he leans and thus reaches his home. Or a man is carrying a heavy load, another comes and takes hold of it with him, so that the weight, before intolerable, becomes now comparatively easy to be borne. Or a little child is trying to open a door ; the tears are just ready to flow because the attempt has been made again and again in vain, but a strong hand is put forth to help the feeble one, and the door flies open in a moment.

In like manner doth the Spirit afford His help. He giveth power to the faint, strengthening with might in the inner man, upholding the soul along the homeward path ; He helpeth our infirmities, placing, as it were, His own shoulder beneath

the load of our cares and sorrows. He takes away that which hinders. Many a door is too hard for Christian too open, his own corruptions block the way to the mercy-seat, so that prayer becomes a duty more than a pleasure,—plans of usefulness seem unavailing through the perverseness or indifference of those for whom they are made,—hence he is often cast down and ready to give up, but the Spirit is near to help, and in some way the difficulty is met and overcome.

But the Comforter is also the Instructor of Christ's disciples: "He shall teach you all things;" "He shall guide them unto all truth." Very wonderful was the fulfilment of this promise at Pentecost. Only read the address of Peter: how clearly from Psalm and Prophecy could he tell of Christ; and then compare it with his counsel to our Lord a short while before, when he would have had him turn from that cross which was to be the means of salvation to the world.

Nor is the teaching of the Spirit confined to inspired Apostles, or to those engaged in the public ministry of the Word of life. All believers need it, and all may look for it. "They shall be all taught of God."

Do you desire to enter more into the full understanding of Holy Scripture? The Spirit will shine upon the sacred page, and bring the truth to light. It is no less than a perpetual miracle to see the change in this respect, when for the first time the Spirit is earnestly sought. A new meaning seems to start up in every part of the Word, almost in every verse, and those to whom the Bible had hitherto been little better than a dictionary find in it a fountain of heavenly joy.

Would you know more of your own true character? The Spirit will be your Teacher. He will reveal, gradually as you are able to bear it, the evil that lurks within; He will reveal to you the selfishness, the pride, the unbelief, or the impatience that may be your chief snare, and whilst revealing, He will also enable you to resist and overcome it.

Would you know more of Jesus? The Spirit will take of the things of Christ and show them unto you. He will testify of His grace as the Saviour of the lost. He will manifest to you His invitations and promises as reaching yourself and all the peculiarities of your own sin or temptation. He will enable you to see in Christ the

good Physician exactly suited to your necessities. He will set Christ before you, as your Counsellor in difficulty, as your Intercessor in the hour of prayer, as your everlasting Refuge and Strength in the days of feebleness and decaying health.

But the Holy Spirit is also a Remembrancer. He recalls to the memory that which would otherwise be forgotten. "He shall bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." Hence were the Apostles kept from error in recording the discourses of our Lord, and giving precisely those gracious promises, upon a single word of which so much of our comfort depends. Very interesting examples of this office of the Spirit may be found in two passages of this Gospel : viz., ii. 22 ; xii. 14—16.

But all believers need the work of the Spirit in recalling the truth to mind. For all that is evil our memories are very retentive ; for all that is good they are very treacherous,—justly compared to "leaking vessels." (See Heb. ii. 1, margin.)

But the Spirit in this grants His aid. He gives an increasing relish for heavenly things that makes it so much the easier to remember them. He brings back at the right moment a particular

prayer, or promise, or precept,—some act of Christ, or some feature of His holy character that may just then be requisite to counteract a temptation, or to support the heart through some pressing emergency. And even when the memory fails as to the very words of a passage, not seldom through the Spirit a savour of the truth abides which effects the very same result.

For this blessed Spirit to be your Comforter, your Helper, your Teacher, your Remembrance, let me entreat each reader of these pages continually to pray. Our Father knows well that there is no gift which so honours Himself or brings such blessedness to His people, as His Spirit abiding in them. Hence there is no petition which He delights more to answer than for this. The old promise of Luke xi. is not yet worn out, and never shall be whilst a sinner remains to be saved or a saint to be made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light : “ If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children ; how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him ? ”

Hence to ask for this gift in the name of our exalted High Priest, and believably to anticipate its bestowal, becomes one of the greatest possible means of grace. Ask it for the glory of God ; ask it for the honour of Christ ; ask it because of your own deep necessities : and whilst you ask for yourself, ask for the whole Church of the Redeemed that the Spirit may come down in power, that the Temple of the Lord may be filled with His light and truth.

And take heed lest in any way you grieve the Divine Spirit to depart from you. In the case I supposed in a former part of this chapter, it might be possible in many ways for the man to grieve his guest to forsake his roof. If the house were not properly ordered, if other guests were introduced whose company were distasteful to him, if a word of kindly counsel were disregarded, if he were in any way slighted or his presence undervalued, he would be most likely to quit the dwelling of one who thus requited his benefactor. And thus the loving Spirit may also be vexed and provoked to leave the heart where He hath taken up His abode.

If impurity or ill-will defile the temple, if pride or envy or selfishness or unbelief be per-

mitted to gain a footing, if wrath or malice or unchristian tempers be allowed to lodge within, if the still small voice of reproof or counsel be unheeded, if prayer, or the Word, or the Holy Communion be reckoned of small importance, you will drive your Friend away ; you will be left wretched, desolate, and comfortless. And though in pity He may yet return again, great will be your loss, great will be the advantage the enemy of souls will gain.

Christian, be watchful, be circumspect. If you live in the Spirit, walk in the Spirit. Cherish His presence as the chiefest joy of your soul. As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so do you long for His refreshing grace. Do this, and the Holy Spirit will ever abide with you ; thus your peace shall be as a river, the foretaste of that joy which is laid up for you in heaven.

Our blest Redeemer, ere He breathed
His tender last farewell,
A Guide, a Comforter bequeathed,
With us to dwell.

He came sweet influence to impart ;
A gracious, willing guest,
While He can find one humble heart
Wherein to rest.

And His that gentle voice we hear,
Soft as the breath of even,
That checks each thought, that calms each fear,
And speaks of heaven.

And every virtue we possess,
And every victory won,
And every thought of holiness,
Are His alone.

Spirit of purity and grace,
Our weakness, pitying, see ;
O make our hearts Thy dwelling place,
And meet for Thee.

XVIII.

The Way of Access.

Through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.—EPH. ii. 18.

To know God in all the mystery of His Being is altogether beyond the power of finite man. “Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection? It is as high as heaven, what canst thou do? deeper than hell, what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.” Who can fathom the deep things connected with the doctrine of the ever blessed Trinity? In what sense can Three be yet One? How can the Infinite Jehovah and finite man be one person in Christ? How doth the Holy Ghost come forth from the Father and the Son? Such inquiries may perplex but they cannot profit the believer. They are amongst the secret things that belong unto the Lord our God.

But to know God as a reconciled Father in

Christ, and to hold communion with Him through the Spirit, this may be attained, and when it is, becomes the very gate of heaven. It is for this purpose that it is needful to hold fast, and in a practical way, the Scripture revelation of the Triune God. In this way is it brought out in the third chapter of the Gospel of St. John. By the Father's love is salvation provided. By the lifting up of the Son on the cross is salvation wrought out. By the Divine Spirit is salvation brought nigh in the regeneration and renewal of the soul. The fourteenth chapter of the same Gospel, and the eighth of the Epistle to the Romans, beside many other chapters, are full of the same mystery, and in the same practical form.

In a very short compass we have it also in the words of the Apostle, quoted above, addressed to the Ephesian Church.

Would you draw nigh to God? Would you cross the gulf that separates the sinner from the presence and favour of his Creator, or having crossed, draw nearer and yet nearer to Him? Then hide in your heart this comprehensive saying. It is within itself a little Gospel. It contains, as the acorn the oak, the germ of all that is revealed for our everlasting peace.

"Through Him (*i.e.* Christ our peace) we both (Jews and Gentiles) have access by one Spirit unto the Father." It is as "a Father" that God is here set before us. It is not as the Almighty, the Glorious Jehovah, the Great Judge,—but as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our Father in Him. Within our lips are put the words, "Our Father, which art in heaven." We are taught that "Our Father knoweth what things we need before we ask Him;" and that with more love than human parents know, "will our Father in heaven give good things to them that ask Him."

And let none shrink from the use of this endearing name, even on their first approach to the Mercy-seat. Though you may hitherto have been an alien, a stranger to God, yet nevertheless in a sense, you have been a child. "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me."

The son in the parable, though long an exile, disobedient and rebellious, yet on his returning home takes this as his ground of hope: "I will arise and go to my father, and say unto him, *Father*," etc. None so far off, none so unworthy, that our God will chide them for

aching Him thus and relying upon His early love.

it thus to draw nigh, we must come in the appointed. It is "through Him," through Saviour that hath made reconciliation by cross. "I am the door," He hath said ; "by f any man enter in he shall be saved." And I : "I am the way, the truth, and the life; man cometh unto the Father but by Me." Other door ever has been opened, no other ever has been or can be discovered but the Mediator, Jesus Christ, by which sinful man bold communion with a Holy God. Would then, amidst conscious guilt and unworthiness put in your claim for an audience with the al King ? Behold Christ as set forth to be Advocate with Him. Behold Him that yet in His body the marks of the death that He red on your behalf, and let not the sense of nt infirmity or past sin rob you of the prie of access to the Mercy-seat through Him.

Father, God, who seest in me
Only sin and misery,
Turn to Thine Anointed One,—
Look on Thy beloved Son ;
Him for sinners bruised see :
Look through Jesu's wounds on me.

The confidence which this may impart in the hour of prayer, is set before us in Heb. x. 19-22. "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; and having an High Priest over the house of God ; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water."

Washed in the waters of baptism, as emblematical of the purifying of the soul, sprinkled with the atoning blood, as loosing the conscience from guilt, we may draw near unto the very inner presence-chamber of the Divine Majesty. That blood in which we trust removes every barrier ; that human Body, once rent upon the cross, forms for us a way that in days past was unknown ; that ever-living High Priest fails not to forward our suit and to present our petition. It is needful for an advocate in a court of justice to be able to put himself exactly in the place of his client, and it is an exceeding consolation for us to know that Jesus can do this. As man He once placed Himself by our side, and now as

man He is glorified, and forgets not those temptations which for our sake He once endured in the flesh. Very much of the efficacy of prayer in calming the troubled spirit, and imparting strength in the day of suffering, depends upon our realizing the humanity of our Lord. Hear with respect to this the testimony of a Christian physician, the late George Wilson, of Edinburgh :

“ When I was recovering from the loss of my foot, you can well believe that there were many weary, wretched, sleepless hours, particularly during darkness. Especially dreary was the first waking in the dull, grey morning. Despair seemed ready to overwhelm me. It was then I fully realized the unspeakable preciousness of prayer, and that not to a mysterious agency, but to a Person, possessing as I possess a human nature, though unlike mine His nature is sinless. Here was the precious thought, ‘ We have not a High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities ; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.’ There was no kind of trial I had which Christ had not ; He could understand it from a fellow-feeling as Man, apart from discerning it as omniscient God. He heard my prayers ; He loved

me with His great love, and His good Spirit reminded me that the Saviour said, ‘Lo, I am with you always.’”

Yet in spite of the encouragement afforded by the intercession of Christ, it is not easy to pray. To no duty is the heart more averse. Heavenly desires do not naturally arise, and without desire prayer is but a form. Distractions of various kinds likewise make it almost impossible to fix the thoughts ; and to speak to One out of sight, pouring all our hearts and woes, needs much faith in the presence and mercy of our God. All this our Father knows full well, and accordingly promises to aid us by His good Spirit. It is not only “through Christ,” but also “by one Spirit,” that we have access to Him. “The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities ; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought ; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”

Let none despise a groan, a look, a sigh, a tear Godward. When through the weakness of the flesh, or the manifold sorrows and distresses of this troublesome world, you are borne down and oppressed in heart and mind ; yet, relying upon the Spirit’s grace, let the inner spirit turn

toward the Great Intercessor, and though not a word is uttered, that silent petition will surely reach the mark. Yes, whatever form it may take, the Spirit must suggest and prepare those suits which the Father hears. This thought has been illustrated by the procedure in the Court of Queen's Bench. Whoever would bring a matter before the Court needs the barrister to urge the plea, but he needs also the attorney to prepare the pleading. So also do we need Jesus, our Advocate, to take our part before the great Judge, and also the Holy Spirit to frame our petitions for us, that they may be acceptable to God.

It is the Spirit that breaks down the proud reluctance of the natural heart ; it is the Spirit that opens out to our view the root of sin that by all means must be mortified and at length eradicated ; it is the Spirit that gives a realizing apprehension of the nearness of God, and of the advocacy of Christ ; it is the Spirit that quickens all that is dead, and strengthens all that is weak in this blessed privilege.

Though the throne of grace is free and open to all who draw nigh in humility, though Jesus stands by ready to plead the cause of all who

confide in His mediation, but for the Spirit it would be all in vain. But for His mighty working, all through the wide world not a true worshipper would be found ; not one utterance of believing prayer would reach the ear of the great Father of Mankind.

Reader, do you value this merciful provision which has been thus made by the Triune God ? Do you pray, and do you pray in the name of Christ ? Do you "pray in the Spirit," knowing that it is from Him cometh every holy desire, and every good thought ?

Look back over the hours of the past week, the past month, the past year, and suppose that all such petitions were inscribed on the walls of your chamber, how many would be recorded there ? How many confessions of sin, how many prayers for pardon, for the grace of the Spirit, for the spiritual well-being of others, could be read there ? Look and see, for all is known to Him that shall be our Judge. If there be no prayer there is no spiritual life, and if you abide without this, you are undone for ever.

But if you value prayer, often speak to your own heart, both as to the *certainty* of its success,

and also as to the *large measure of blessing* which our Father is wont to give to those who earnestly seek Him.

That its success is certain Jesus very plainly sets before us in many passages. One argument which He employs to assure us of it is especially worthy of our attention. Perhaps it is the strongest to be found in Holy Scripture. We find it written in the fourteenth chapter of St. John's Gospel,—“Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”

See how the case stands. Suppose for a moment that it were possible that any one were to kneel down, and for the sake of Jesus humbly to ask somewhat needful for himself, for a fellow-Christian, or for Christ's Church; and suppose the Father were to turn a deaf ear to such a cry, and to refuse to give the best answer, which of course He in His wisdom alone could determine,—what would be the result?

Would He not dishonour His well-beloved Son, whose name had been the petitioner's only plea? Still more, in dishonouring His Son, would He not bring dishonour upon His own Holy Name? Assuredly therefore for His own

glory, for the honour of Jesus, He will do this: He will never disregard the feeble cry of the weakest Christian that is breathed forth in the name of Jesus. But when he hears the prayer that is offered, when in answer to it He manifests afresh His power and grace, then in the sight of His Church, in the sight of the Holy angels doth He declare the worthiness of His Son's mediation; that Christ's merits far more than counterbalance all our own merits, and His righteousness our unrighteousness. Thus doth He place the crown on the head of our Great High Priest: the Son is glorified and the Father is glorified in Him.

Then consider also *the measure* as well as *certainty* of the blessing. If we look to ourselves in ourselves as that by which He would proportion His gifts, well might we expect little; but this is not the rule or the measure of His bestowing. It is not our earnestness or grace we have already received, but His infinite fulness, the riches of His glory, the infinite supply of grace which is in Himself, His own incomprehensible and boundless love, is that to which we should look. Marvellous measure of blessing to be looked for in a

to believing prayer, as set before us by St. Paul in Ephesians iii. The Apostle had been asking for the Ephesian Church the greatest possible spiritual gifts, the strengthening might of the Holy Ghost, the indwelling of Christ within the heart, the knowledge of the love that yet passeth knowledge, the fruition of all the fulness of God. Then he adds an ascription of praise, in which he sets forth how much of all this believers may hope to attain. Step by step he raises our expectations to the very utmost pitch. "Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end." We inquire, Can He give us what we ask? Yea, "He is able to do *what we ask*." But I have much that I know not how to ask? "He is able to do what we ask *or think*." But shall it be but a little of this? No! "*all* we ask or think." More than this? Yes: "*above all* we ask or think." More still? Yea, "*abundantly* above all we ask or think." Is more than even this possible? Yes: "*exceeding* abundantly above all we ask or think." And all this according

to the almighty working of the Eternal ;
that worketh in the hearts of all God's
dren.

Now stand at the top of this ladder of
See how God's thoughts are far above
thoughts, and His givings beyond our a
So able is He to bestow, and as willing as
able, altogether beyond the limits that
our stunted faith are ready to assign Him.

In remembrance of this let us, like
Apostle, give glory to Him. Let us believe
praise, and rejoice. Let us make the words
Dr. Carey our own : "Expect great things
God and attempt great things for God." Let
strive more to honour and exalt the Ever-
Father, who invites us to His mercy seat
Eternal Son, who ever stands forth to please
cause ; and likewise the ever blessed Spirit,
is the glory of every fervent prayer which we

Sweetly, in a better home, shall ascend.

O God of life, whose power benign
Doth o'er the world in mercy shine,
Accept our praise, for we are Thine.

O Father, all creating Lord,
Be Thou by every tongue implored,
Be Thou by every heart adored.

O Son of God, for sinners slain,
We bless Thee, Lord, whose dying pain
For us did endless life regain.

O Holy Ghost, whose guardian care
Doth us for heavenly joys prepare ;
May we in Thy communion share.

O Holy, blessed Trinity,
With faith we sinners bow to Thee ;
In heaven and earth exalted be.

XIX.

Individual Faith.

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.—*GAL. ii. 20.*

WHATEVER be the instrumentality which God may employ in restoring to Himself one that has been hitherto a stranger to His grace, it is of the utmost importance for the enquirer to be assured, that with reference to his acceptance with the Most High, he has to do with One, and One only. Not many mediators, not many priests, but one Mediator and one Priest. “There is one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”

Personal dealings with a personal Saviour is the one all-essential requisite to everlasting salvation.

Very plainly does this stand out in the words of St. Paul above quoted. He presents to us within a short compass the source of all his strength, peace, and usefulness: “I am crucified with

Christ." In the death of Jesus Paul died to the law. Its curse could no longer touch him. Once punished for sin in his Surety there was henceforth to him no condemnation. He was moreover crucified to sin and the world. He was no longer their slave. The sight of the Redeemer nailed to the cross for his transgression destroyed their power over him.

"Nevertheless I live." The truest life, the noblest life, begins in death, even in the death of the old man, the carnal nature. All other life, apart from Divine grace, is but spiritual death. "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth."

"Yet not I." Grace ever casts off all confidence in self. "I laboured more abundantly than they all; *yet not I*, but the grace of God that was with me." So here again: "I live; *yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.*" This latter expression is remarkable. Christ liveth at the right hand of God, yet doth He also live within the heart of the believer. By the Holy Spirit He dwells within that sacred temple, enlightening it with the rays of His heavenly light, and purifying it from all evil.

And this life of Christ within the soul, can

only be experienced in the exercise of faith in Him. "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Mark here the singular number employed, and not the plural. It is not "we" and "us," but "I" and "me." This is the individual faith taking hold of the person. Mark also the one single object of faith. It is looking to the crucified Son of God. It is looking to the true brazen serpent, the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world. As an illustration parallel to this passage, I would ask the reader to pay careful attention to the individuality of the promises of life made in the first chapter of the Gospel. The third person singular, and next to it the third person plural, is that most commonly employed. It is not usually "they" and "them," but "he" and "him." It is not "all that believeth," but "so much as every one that believeth," "Whosoever believeth." Read the Gospel of St. John thoughtfully, and you cannot fail to be struck with this. Take only a few instances out of the first chapter: "He that heareth My word and believeth on Me, that sent Me hath everlasting life." "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out." "I am the door: by Me if any man enter

he shall be saved." "I am the resurrection and the life : he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die."

Now was there not a purpose in the Spirit employing this mode of expression? Was it not to show that men become not partakers of salvation in the mass, by belonging to one great corporate body, through participation in certain ordinances; but by personal, individual faith, by each man or woman coming to the Saviour through the guiding of the Holy Ghost, drawing nigh in heart-felt prayer, relying upon the promise of life which is in Christ. And there is in St. John's Gospel also the same prominent setting forth of the one great object of faith, that we find to be the case with the Apostle Paul. It is ever Christ Himself: not merely certain truths which He hath taught, these are deeply important, but only so as they lead on to Him; nor the Church which He hath founded, nor the sacraments which He hath ordained,—but Himself,—the Light of the world,—the Door,—the Way,—the resurrection and the life,—the spring of all the grace that the soul requires. It is "cometh to *Me*" "believeth on *Me*." "*By Me* if any man enter in."

And what is this faith, this believing, coming to Christ? It is no mere empty, it is no mere utterance, "I believe:" it product of corrupt human nature: but is faith wrought in the heart by the Holy Ghost is the faith that beholds Christ as set forth in Holy Scripture, that looks to Him as the Son of God, that turns to His cross as the sufficient atonement for sin, that regards promise as firmer than the everlasting hills.

It is the faith that brings a man face to face with the Saviour. It is as the woman to Him and deriving virtue from the touch, as Bartimæus crying, "Jesus, Thou Son of man, have mercy on me." It is as the leper before Christ: "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." It is the faith that hath a soul going before,—namely conviction of sin; a goodly train of fair daughters that follow after, namely, hope, love, obedience, patience, submission to the will of God, a life of prayer, praise, all holy works, and all heavenly desire. It is the faith that parts with all else rather than part with Christ; that saith to Him, "Lord, whom shall I go, Thou hast the words of eternal life?" "Whom have I in heaven but Thee?

here is none upon earth that I desire beside
thee?"

What know you, reader, of a faith like this? Without a faith that brings with it something of his spirit, be persuaded that all else will be in vain. You may be very estimable in the eye of man, you may be a very pattern of moral excellence in the various relationships of life, you may be a member of Christ's visible Church, you may have a right creed, and a zeal for the truth, you may be a visitor of the poor, a teacher of the young, a liberal contributor to benevolent and religious societies, you may partake often of the Holy Communion, yet in spite of all, you will be rejected at the great day unless deep, deep down your very heart of hearts, there be enshrined Christ,—Christ your joy,—Christ your trust,—Christ your only hope and salvation. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."

But that faith in which the Divine life begins that also by which it is carried on to perfection. Faith in Christ was to the Apostle the means by which he obtained acceptance and justification:

but it was more than this, it was the strength in which he vanquished every obstacle, and by which he wrought such abundant labours.

Perhaps here it may be well to anticipate an objection that may occur to some reader, that in thus exalting faith we may seem to undervalue the sacraments which Christ hath ordained for the benefit of His Church. Nay, rather, in following the mind of the Spirit in the word, and putting faith into its due prominence, we honour the sacraments instead of depreciating them. For what is their true purpose and intention? It is to be the handmaidens of faith. In Holy Scripture, as in the teaching of our Church, faith hath ever the preeminence. The eleventh Article sets forth precisely the teaching of our Lord in St. John's Gospel, and of the Apostle Paul in the Epistles to the Romans and the Galatians, and in fact of every part of the Word of God. It declares that "we are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, *by faith, and not for our own work and deservings;*" and also that this doctrine of "justification *by faith only* is a most wholesome doctrine and very full of comfort." Would that this Article were written in illuminated letter-

on the study-wall, and written by the Spirit on the heart, of every clergyman of our reformed Church! In the light of this truth the sacraments take their right position. They are seals of faith. They are sure witnesses of God's favour and good-will toward such as rightly receive them. They are means by which He doth quicken, strengthen, and confirm our faith in Him. What do we then, in exalting faith, but honour, as God would have us, the two sacraments which Christ hath appointed to minister unto her?

To exercise therefore a life-long faith in Christ, to strive and labour for its growth and increase, in the study of Divine truth, in constant prayer, in the frequent and devout attendance at public worship, and in a faithful reception of the Lord's Supper, is the way to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. The Christian, like the Apostle, can only live by the faith of the Son of God. He must live upon the treasury of grace which is laid up in Him. From Him as the storehouse of heavenly riches must all his supplies be drawn.

An illustration may make this clearer. A widowed mother has an only son. She is left

without means, but the son has risen to a position of affluence. He writes to her a letter full of warm, tender affection, expressing his desire to do all within his power to provide for her comfort during the latter days of her life. Thus she lives without anxiety for the future. For the rent of her cottage, for food, for clothing, for all else, she lives upon her son. In every strait and necessity she has but to apply to him, and she knows that he will permit her to want nothing. Would any one attempt to disturb her confidence, she would say, "I know that he has abundance, and will never let me want." "But may he not grow weary of helping you?" "Nay: he loves me, and has already given such proofs of his love, that I can never, never doubt, that he will care for me to the end of my days."

Christian, thus are you permitted, nay, commanded to live on Christ for all you need. It hath pleased the Father, that in Him should all fulness dwell, and you cannot honour the Father or the Son more than by constantly resorting thither for every possible want.

I lay my wants on Jesus :
All fulness dwells in Him ;
He heals all my diseases,
He doth my soul redeem.

I lay my griefs on Jesus,
My burdens and my cares ;
He from them all releases,
He all my sorrow shares.

For pardon and for peace, for strength and for sanctification, for repose and refreshing, for wisdom, for guidance, for assurance of life eternal, rely evermore on Jesus alone.

And why should you doubt His power or readiness to supply whatever you may require ? Hath He not an abundant store ? Are not all things in His hand, and at His disposal for the benefit of His Church ? Is He not full of grace and truth ? Is He not rich to all that call upon Him ? And hath He given no proof of His love ? Can you not say with Paul—"He loved me, and gave Himself for me ?" Hath He not manifested toward you perpetually His faithfulness and loving kindness ? Hath he not given you many and many a token, many a gift unsought, and many a gift you have desired in prayer, to show that He careth for you ? Therefore be of good cheer. Consider what Christ is ; consider how free and gracious are His promises ; consider what He hath already done for you, and let none disturb your confidence in Him. In every *sorrowful hour*, in every season of sore trial or

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fear, make it your ground of steadfast hope that you have One that cannot and will not fail you.

"The Lord is my Shepherd : I shall not want."
"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

The voice of our Lord and Creator
Our inmost spirit thrills,
As with gentle, loving accents,
 Each fear it stills ;
Saying, "Fear not : I am with thee !
Always will I abide,
In pity and love unfailing,
 Close by thy side."

Dear Saviour, we fain would feel Thee,
Ever quite near to us ;
Oh ! come in Thy loving-kindness,
 And bless us thus :
So shall we through all life's changes
Thy work and will pursue,
Till in scenes of eternal glory
 Thy face we view !

XX.

Not One Forgotten.

Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.—LUKE xii. 6, 7.

No traveller in Syria will long need an introduction to the sparrow. There are countless numbers of them about you. They are a tame, troublesome and impertinent generation, and nestle just where you don't want them. They top up your stove and water pipes, build in the windows and under the beams of the roof, and would stuff your hat full of stubble if they found it hanging in a place to suit them. They are extremely pertinacious in asserting their right of possession, and have not the least reverence for my place or thing. David alludes to these characteristics of the sparrow in the eighty-fourth Psalm, when he complains that they had appropriated even the altars of God for their nests.

Concerning himself he says, "I watch, and am as a sparrow upon the housetop." When one of them has lost its mate, a matter of every day occurrence, he will sit on the housetop alone, and lament by the hour his sad bereavement. These birds are snared and caught in great numbers, but as they are small and not much relished for food, five sparrows may still be sold for two farthings : and when we see their countless numbers, and the eagerness with which they are destroyed as a worthless nuisance, we can better appreciate the assurance that our Heavenly Father who takes care of them, so that not one can fall to the ground without His notice, will surely take care of us, who are of more value than many sparrows." *

These words of one long resident in Syria give us a vivid conception of the illustration which our Lord employs. The individuality of God's care, and His special providence with regard to every event that concerns us, is the point to which I would direct the attention of the reader. Take it in all its breadth and fulness, and it gives a marvellous view of the Omniscience, the Omni-

* "The Land and the Book," by Dr. Thomson.

presence, the infinite goodness and wisdom of our God.

It is no doubt in a special sense true with respect to the household of faith. They are the friends of Jesus, and the children of God's adoption. It was to them especially that Jesus spoke, when he uttered the tender assurance of the Father's care. Yet we may not limit this word to them alone. If God watcheth over every sparrow, surely He doth over every one of mankind. His tender mercies are over all His works.

Only try to realize the wondrous thought. Think of the crowds passing over London bridge in the course of a single day: think of the crowds that flock to such a scene as the International Exhibition in Paris: or go far beyond this, and think for a moment of all the villages, towns, and cities of the various countries of the world, and then grasp if you can the truth that not the very least concern that appertains to the very least of those who inhabit them is beneath the regard of the Most High. Well may we exclaim with David, "Lord, what is man that Thou takest knowledge of him! or the Son of man that Thou makest account of him!"

Yet what is the whole Scripture from Genesis

to the Revelation, but one continuous testimony to the truth of this doctrine ? To deny (special supervision of man's affairs, and at the same time to hold by the authority and inspiration of the Word is plainly impossible.

Take but one single Psalm, the 139th, a portion of Scripture which concerns alike the sinner and the saint, and we cannot but observe the manner in particularity with which the Spirit sets forth the great truth which we are considering. It is the individual soul that engages the mind of God. When he ariseth, when he resteth within his house, when he walketh by the wayside, when he lieth down, what are his thoughts, words and ways,—nothing of all this escapeth the searching eye of Him with whom we have to do. “ O thou hast searched me, and know me; thou knowest my down-sitting and mine uprising. Thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways, for there is no word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord, Thou knowest it altogether.”

Parallel to this Psalm place such a narrative as that of Ahab. See how true it is with reference to the wicked. Whilst we read the history

this man and Jezebel, the conviction is perpetually forced upon us, that every step in a course of iniquity is before the eyes of the Lord. Parallel to this Psalm, again, might we trace the recorded histories of God's children. What a silver thread of Divine superintendence and direction may be traced running throughout them! Who but must see the eye and the hand of the All-wise guiding Joseph every step of his course? Why did his brethren spare his life? Why did the Ishmaelites pass by at the critical moment? Why was he thrown into the very prison where the king's prisoners were? Why did the butler remember him after two years forgetfulness? Surely we must discern in all this, that the way of man is not in himself: that it is not man that walketh to direct his steps."

And if this were so in the life of Joseph, why not in the case of all God's children, why not, indeed, in your case and mine? The same truth is seen as plainly in the New Testament as in the Old. It is taught us in the care which God exerciseth over every sparrow. It is taught us when our Lord tells us that the good Shepherd goeth after the one sheep in the wilderness, and that He calleth His own sheep by name and leadeth them

out. It is taught by the fact that He called His disciples one by one into fellowship with Himself, and trained each one by a special discipline.

Now if this be so, as we cannot doubt, if there be this special regard fixed on every one, it shows clearly that *we must come and stand out in our individuality before Him that judgeth us.* We cannot lose ourselves in a crowd. We cannot escape His eye amidst ten thousand others. We cannot get rid of our personal responsibility, or by any means shift it upon another's shoulder.

"Every man shall bear his own burden." "Every one of us shall give account of himself to God." "Behold, He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him."

Hear the experience of one who had been brought nigh to death, and then had learnt to realize this more than ever before: "I believe from what I have felt when brought very near to the grave, that the engrossing, devouring idea is that of one's own personality and God's personality. The prevailing feeling is that of the great Judge waiting for our soul as if there were no other soul in existence, and we in our naked spirituality, without one relative, earthly friend

or well-wisher, about to pass into the darkness and stand before God."

Let then each reader look at religion as a personal matter. Place yourself alone beneath the eye of God. Think of that page in the book of remembrance in which your own particular sins are recorded, and bring the sins written therein to the fountain which has been opened. In the power of the Holy Ghost do you yourself repent, confess, believe, and love. Behold the uplifted Saviour, the true brazen serpent, that all the wounds of your soul may be healed. If hitherto living in the far country, in wilful disobedience, in heedless unconcern, or in a whirl of vanity and dissipation, return back to thy Father's house, assured that He hath a welcome ready, and that angels wait to rejoice over "one sinner that repenteth."

To remember this truth will also be an exceeding encouragement in secret prayer. Go into your chamber, and there all alone with your God, pour out your heart before Him. Keep Him not at a distance, deal not with Him as you would with a stranger, but make Him your confidant, unfold to Him each sorrow and anxiety, each

present trouble, each fear that haunts you as to the future. Your very least concerns, the veriest trifle that disturbs your peace, bring unto Him, even as a child would come to a parent for sympathy and help. Should you feel lonely and desolate, far away from Christian friends in some retired corner of the world, or on board ship thousands of miles from land, or shut up month after month, unable from ill health to cross the threshold of your door, cast this burden also upon thy Father's heart, and know assuredly that He heareth thy prayer, even thine ; that He is watching thee every moment to uphold thee and keep thee from all harm.

I remember well in visiting a parishioner on one occasion how difficult I found it to gain her attention. She had a little infant just able to creep about the room, and instead of listening to me I saw that her eyes were following the little one along its way, and her thoughts no less occupied with it. I told her that she reminded me of a passage of Scripture, and requested her to take her Bible and open it at 2 Chron. xvi. I then read to her part of the ninth verse : "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew Him-

self strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him," then I added : " Your eyes run to and fro through this room, that you may help your little one the moment it requires your aid, so our Father in heaven is ever on the lookout to succour those that walk uprightly in His fear."

And if this be so at all times, how much more when in prayer your eyes are upon Him : when perhaps all that you can do in your distress is to turn your suppliant gaze upward, and wait for His promised help. Think not for a moment that He could or would forget to hear and answer your petition. An answer of peace will surely come in due season, and meanwhile there is ever a joy in thus unburdening our griefs before the mercy-seat.'

Pray : the Lord is ever nigh,
Ready still with open ear ;
Wait : and He will yet supply
Hope and strength for every fear.
Pilgrim, weeping at the gate,
Hear His message—" Pray and wait."

Remember also this truth of God's particular providence to strengthen your faith when painful events occur whose meaning you cannot fathom. Many a dispensation is now shrouded in dark-

ness, and we cannot even guess at the purpose for which God has permitted it. A sudden accident takes away the prop of a family or perhaps the main-stay of the Lord's cause in a particular neighbourhood, or it may be many hundred persons are suddenly cut off; and unbelief is then apt to creep in, and question the wisdom, or equity, or goodness of the Lord's dealings.

With one whom I knew years ago was this the case. She truly loved her Saviour, but her confidence was often sorely tried. Did she hear the report of any great calamity, a shipwreck, a fire in which life was lost, a colliery accident, or the like, the Tempter would suggest to her that there was no overruling Providence, or that the God in whom she trusted could not be one whose name was Love. Still she turned not back, but waited on the Lord; she still leaned on her Saviour, and at length through His grace was more than conqueror. As her latter end drew near all these distressing doubts fled away. Passing through the valley she found it illumined with the light of heaven. In peace she entered into that rest, where we shall learn the secret of all which has most perplexed us on earth.

If any reader be harassed by these fiery darts
the Wicked One, stay not to reason, but fall
back on the faithful Word of Christ. In spite
of all appearances doubt not that our Father
is mercifully, pitifully compassionates mankind. Not
one is forgotten, not one is uncared for. And if
I would have still further assurance of this,
I may find it in the death of the Well-beloved.
Thus have we a conclusive answer to every
doubt and every doubt. Whatever hath happened,
whatever may happen, through the love of God
we have died to redeem our souls, and to open
us the gates of paradise; hence have we a
witness of His good-will to man that none can
discredit.

We cannot always trace the way
Where Thou, our gracious Lord, doth move,
But we can always surely say,
That Thou art love.

When mystery shrouds our darken'd path,
We'll check our dread, our doubts reprove :
In this our soul sweet comfort hath,
That Thou art love.

Yes ! Thou art love ;—a truth like this
Can every gloomy thought remove,
And turn all tears, all woes to bliss :
Our God is love.

XXI.

One in Christ.

There shall be one fold and one Shepherd.—JOHN x. 16.

THERE has arisen of late years a yearning for more unity in the body of Christ. Nor can we be surprised at this. When Christ came into the world He found it split up into a variety of sects and religions, and His very aim in redemption was to gather together these scattered fragments of the human family, binding them in one holy bond to Himself, and thus knitting them one to the other, and to the Father in Him. And truly it were a glorious thing if in these days when commerce and swift ships and railways and electric wires are bringing men far nearer together than in days past, a still stronger, holier bond, even of Christian faith and love, were to knit in one all professedly Christian Churches; if communities, once arrayed in arms against

each other, were now to be banded together in a holy crusade against all the vice and worldliness and unbelief that defile our earth.

But if ever this unity is in any measure to be attained, we may be assured that it can only be in the exercise of Divine power, so great are the obstacles that stand in the way; and we may be certain, likewise, that this power will only be put forth to accomplish that which God Himself hath purposed.

Let us enquire, therefore, from the Word of God, what is intended by the unity of the body of Christ.

In meeting this enquiry I would especially direct the attention of the reader to three passages in St. John's Gospel.

The first passage, in John x. 16, presents the subject in its very simplest form. We have Christ speaking of Himself as the good Shepherd: "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one fold, and one Shepherd." There needs here an important correction in the translation. The word "fold," in the latter clause, is quite distinct from that in the former, and ought to be rendered "flock." In

the original, the latter sentence is a striking antithesis : "there shall be one flock, one Shepherd." There is doubtless an allusion to Ezekiel xxxiv. 22, 23 ; "Therefore will I save my flock and I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David."

Thus the unity of the Church is here set forth, not as consisting in one fold, one external communion, but in the flock being shepherded by one great Shepherd. By His tender care is each straying one brought back, by Him are all alike guided and guarded, to Him are all equally known and indebted for the same gift of eternal life. All alike hear the voice, and follow the footsteps of their Shepherd, and thus are they one flock, howsoever for a season separated one from the other.

Turn to a second passage, John xi. 49—52. Caiaphas had been counselling to put Christ to death, and in doing so had used language teaching God's object in permitting it.

The same spirit which spoke by the lips of wicked Balaam, spoke also by the Jewish High Priest. St. John quotes the words, and adds *His own inspired comment.* "And one of them,

named Caiaphas, being the High Priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he, not of himself, but being High Priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation, and not for that nation only, *but that also He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.*"

Here we find the death of the Shepherd is the great bond of unity. The cross of Christ is the great magnet by which men are drawn to Him, and thus to each other. It is the great meeting-place of all true Christians. In one sense it makes all other differences to vanish. It binds together Jew and Gentile, the peer and the peasant, the learned and the ignorant, the bond and the free. At the cross they learn their common ruin, they rejoice in one common salvation, and the same love is kindled in every breast.

As the sin of the first Adam wrought separation and strife, soon manifested in the murder of Abel by his brother Cain, so the cross of the second Adam afresh binds men together in a bond never to be loosed.

Truly it was a marvellous triumph of science and of human effort which could fetch up the severed cable from the depths of the Atlantic, and thus unite by another link the old and the new worlds. A far more glorious triumph hath Christ won, by His most precious death restoring to the family of man that bond of unity which seemed for ever lost, and thus knitting together the redeemed in one holy fellowship of eternal love.

Turn now to a third passage. It is a part of that great prayer of intercession offered by our Lord on the dark night of His agony and shame. Deeply important is its bearing on this subject, since no less than five times did He pray for His people, that they might be one. (John xvii. 20—23.) “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word ; that they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us : that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me. And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them ; that they may be one, even as we are one ; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one ; and that the world may know that Thou

hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me." (Compare also verse 11.)

This passage and the prayer from which it is taken distinctly define those to be included in this bond of unity. It is those "given to Christ by the Father;" it is those who "are not of the world," those "kept from the evil" and "sanctified by the truth;" it is those "*that believe on Christ through the word*" *delivered by the Apostles.*

Especially bear in mind, as so frequently set before us in this Gospel, that it is only *through believing* that we receive the inestimable privileges that belong to the Church of Christ. The promise of eternal life and of deliverance from condemnation is made repeatedly by our Lord to all those that come to Him and believe in His name. For this very purpose does the Evangelist narrate the miracles which Christ wrought: "These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, ye might have life through His name."

Never, never let go your hold of this truth, that the very hinge upon which your salvation turns, the very key that unlocks to you all its treasures, is this direct, personal coming for

yourself to Him, who is the one Mediate Saviour of mankind. Let no human priest usurp His place. Let none rob you of inestimable benefit, that with all your sin all your need, with all your sorrow and you may flee straight to Him, and find a rest in His love. For such as do this own prays: these are they that are united to in Him.

In this passage we learn also the spiritual character of the unity for which we are to live. It arises from the fellowship of believers in the Father and the Son. It resembles the unity that exists between the latter: "that they may be one, as we are." It springs from the fellowship in which all believers are knit together in Christ and the Father: "One in us: " them, and Thou in Me." The believer is knit with Christ in closest bonds. Christ bears on him His glory, that is, His Spirit, His image, His presence, His love, as the tokens of that perfect bliss He shall bestow hereafter. Thus Christ dwells in him by the Spirit, and he dwells in Christ by faith. Thus, as we find in John xiv., the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost make their abode with him. Hence the unity

the whole body. One with the Father and the Son through the Spirit, they cannot but be knit one to the other.

Compare with this view 1 John i. Confessing sin, cleansed in the blood, walking in the light, believers enjoy "fellowship with the Father and the Son," and then also "one with another."

Thus on God's side the unity arises from His beholding His people one in Christ, and from the one Spirit which He hath imparted; on our side the manifestation of this unity is in the exercise of a common faith, and of a common love, to the same great Redeemer.

Here is the unity foretold by the prophet Jeremiah: "I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me for ever." Here is the unity seen in Apostolic days: "The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul." Here is the unity that still exists. Beneath all the strife that sin hath introduced into Christian Churches, beneath all the dissensions that the enemy stirs up, is there not to be found amongst all true followers of the Lamb an underlying principle of real, genuine love one to the other; a love that not seldom has overleaped all barriers of rank, education, variety of opinion;

and so bound men together in the firmest ligaments of a heaven-taught charity? We have heard of two men, perfect strangers to each other, knowing not a word of each other's language, becoming firm friends, because each in evident sincerity could utter the word "Abba."

Very interesting is it to notice the six links by which St. Paul declares the body of Christ to be united. He is urging the Ephesian Church to keep and manifest the unity of the Spirit in love (Eph. iv. 1—6) : He declares that there is "*one body* :" and "*one Spirit*" dwelling in each,—convincing, teaching, sanctifying, comforting: "*one hope of your calling*" in every breast,—the same glorious hope of eternal life: "*one Lord*," even Jesus our Saviour, Master, King: "*one faith*," each soul justified by the same act of affiance, or one revelation of Divine truth in which all are instructed: "*one baptism*," each believer receiving the same seal, making the same profession, dedicated alike to the triune God: "*one God and Father of all*," on Him the whole family depend; His glory is the end they must ever keep in view. Thus are all God's children firmly, indissolubly linked together. Here is that "holy Catholic Church" in which we believe ; that Church which

has its members in every part of the world, and in every age of the world's history ; that Church which rests immoveably on the Rock of Ages, which is compassed about on every side by the might, mercy, and faithfulness of Jehovah ; against which the gates of hell, the powers of darkness, shall never, never prevail !

Let saints below in concert sing
With those to glory gone ;
For all the servants of our King
In heaven and earth are one.

One family we dwell in Him ;
One Church above, beneath,
Though now divided by the stream—
The narrow stream of death.

Let Christians learn from this subject never for the sake of peace or unity to compromise essential truth. The honour of Christ is bound up in the integrity of the truth taught by Himself and His Apostles. We may neither diminish from it, nor add to it. *Unity in the truth is most precious ; unity in error is worse than profitless.* Who would not prefer to sail in a frigate with a small crew, if only she were sound and tight, rather than in a ship ten times the size with a far larger crew, if she were leaky and her timbers rotten ? And

shall we not prefer to maintain our beloved Church in her independence, with her simplicity of worship, with her heritage of primitive truth, proclaiming as she does in her articles the supremacy of Holy Scripture and the blessed doctrine of a free justification by faith alone, rather than join in the efforts made for her union with the Greek and Romish Churches,—Churches where the truth as to the way of salvation has well-nigh perished, and which are weighted with most grievous and deadly errors.

“Let them return to thee, but return not thou to them.” Gladly hold out the right hand of fellowship to all such as will turn again to the pure faith as taught in Holy Scripture, but make no truce with error; stand fast in the liberty of the Gospel, and amidst all the false teaching that abounds on every side, be a faithful witness to the truth as it is in Jesus.

Learn also from this subject to manifest a spirit of true unfeigned charity towards all who bear the Saviour’s name. “Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.” Shameful are the bitter dissensions that are so rife, the harsh stinging words so often

uttered by one Christian against those who cannot see with them in all points. Especially should we grieve that there is so much of this spirit at the present day amongst those who love the same Saviour and hold fast the same necessary truths.

Before the battle of Salamis, when Greece was threatened by hordes of barbarous savages, it was a sore disgrace that the commanders of the fleet should have permitted envies and jealousies to divide their counsels ; and when they ought to have been fighting the Persians, that they should have been quarrelling amongst themselves. No less disgraceful is it that at this time, when the enemies of the truth are all at one that they may away with Evangelical teaching from our land, there should be room left for such painful bickerings amongst those that value it.

Reader, do your part in showing the world that Christians love one another now as in days of yore. Ever remember that truth is many-sided, and therefore how likely it is that you may leave out of sight that which another may see. Be persuaded that the good Shepherd has many more ways of bringing back His wanderers than you might imagine. Whilst you contend earnestly

for the faith once delivered to the saints, ;
filled with charity. Love those that err the
and pray that the Spirit may guide them i
truth.

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not be able to join with others in their so
praise or in their united supplications, bu
Father beholds you as one with them ; a
grace they seek shall descend on you.]
yourself also at such seasons as set apart k
to intercede on behalf of His ministering se
and the congregations meeting in Christ's
Who can tell the showers of blessing, the
that may be touched, the backsliders that :
reclaimed, the faithful ones that may be
forted and strengthened through your be
prayers ?

And wait but a little longer. There shall be complete unity, external as well as spiritual, when Christ returns. As yet indeed we see it not. Christ's visible Church is very imperfect. There are wheat and tares in the same field, sheep and goats in the same fold. Even in Christ's own people there is much that mars the unity of the body,—failings of judgment, failings in temper, a falling short in faith and love. While sin abides in us these things will be found, and lead to much that we deplore. But all this will be changed one day. The yearnings of men's hearts will be satisfied. There will be perfect unity, both outwardly, and also the unity of knowledge, faith and love. Then indeed will there be one Church, its members brought from every clime, yet having now but one language, but one song,—“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain.” Alike will they acknowledge that sin was all they could call their own, and that in one fountain had they washed their robes, even in the all-cleansing blood of Christ.

Reader, shall you be found amongst them? You may be of those “who profess and call themselves Christians,” you may have been admitted into the visible Church at baptism, and

been received to its full privileges in the rite of confirmation, you may have been a regular frequenter of the Lord's House, and a communicant at His table, yet take it as most assuredly true, *without heart-fellowship with the Son of God, you have neither part nor lot in the blessedness of the true Church.* Be sure, whoever may strive to gainsay it, this nearness of spirit, this drawing nigh through the atoning blood into the Holiest of all, is the very pith and marrow of all true godliness.

It is the heart that cleaveth fast to Christ, it is the faith that worketh by love, that constitutes the true Christian.

“We are the circumcision which worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

“O Almighty God, who hast knit together Thine elect in one communion and fellowship, in the mystical body of Thy Son, Christ our Lord; grant us grace so to follow Thy blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those unspeakable joys which Thou hast prepared for them that unfeignedly love Thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

XXII.

Sanctification through the Truth.

**Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy Word is truth.—
JOHN xvii. 17.**

A MORE solemn declaration of the veracity of Holy Scripture it is impossible to conceive than that here given by Christ,—“Thy Word is truth.” In the hour preceding His agony and death, speaking not to His disciples, but in the ear of His Father in heaven, doth He thus appeal to the Omniscient Jehovah: “Thy Word is truth.” Who shall doubt that which He that is the Truth thus asserts? Who that professes the faith of Christ shall hesitate, in spite of ten thousand specious objections, to rely upon that pure Word, which is “as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times?”

Thus doth Christ in one short sentence put His broad seal upon the inspired volume. For within scope of this saying He includes the whole Scriptures. Evidently doth He include

Moses, the Psalms, and the Prophets, but He includes more. He includes the words that He Himself had spoken, and those which by the Spirit of truth the Apostles should hereafter utter or write. "I have given them Thy Word." He prays for those that should believe on Him "through their word." He promises to them the Spirit of truth, that all which they should deliver should be the truth as that which He had delivered to them.

But what shall be the purpose of that Word which is truth? It is their sanctification, their entire consecration, their being set apart in holiness for His service.

Jesus had yielded up Himself as their Redeemer to suffer and to die for this purpose, that through the truth which He had delivered, they might dedicate themselves, all they were and all they possessed, to be holy unto the Lord.

"Sanctify them through Thy truth;" "For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth."

Through the Word is wrought the great change of renewal into life. "Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify

and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word." "Being born again not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever." "Receive with meekness the engrafted Word which is able to save your souls." Suggested by the expression, "the engrafted Word," we may illustrate the great change that is wrought through the Word by a process in gardening. You take a wild briar from the hedge-row, you plant it in your garden, and somewhere about July in the following summer you bud it. You take some two or three of the little germs that are bursting from a rose-bush which you value, you insert them one by one with care in the briar; then, if they take, the whole character of the tree is changed. Instead of the worthless briar you have that which adorns and beautifies your garden.

It is thus with God's Word received into the heart. It may be but a short passage, such as "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners;" but *if it lie close enough*, if it cleave to a man and become one with him, it is forthwith the germ of a new life; the sinner becomes the saint, the worldling becomes the devout and obedient child of God, in some measure he re-

sembles the rose of Sharon, the beauty of the Lord rests upon him, and he is made an ornament in the Church of Christ.

But that Word, which by the Spirit is made the instrument of renewal and conversion, is equally necessary for the perfecting of believers in holiness.

Christ had just before said to the disciples, "Now ye are clean through the word that I have spoken unto you." (Chap. xv. 3.) Yet He also prays that they may be "sanctified through" or rather "*in* the truth." It was the atmosphere in which they must live, if they would abide and grow in holiness.

And indeed what a holy atmosphere is that of the inspired oracles! They are well called by St. Paul "the Holy Scriptures." They are given to prepare for the Lord "a holy nation, a peculiar people." They tell of Him whom the angels sing, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts." They set before us the example of Him who lived on earth, "Holy, harmless and undefiled." They reveal "the Holy Spirit," the Sanctifier. They remind us that "the holy angels" compass our path. They give it as the purpose of our re-

demption that we should walk "before God in holiness and righteousness all our days." They call men to be "holy, as God is holy," and declare that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

Then if we look at the matter more in detail what numberless illustrations might be given of the sanctifying effects of the Word. What backsliders have been reclaimed by such chapters as Jeremiah iii. and Hosea xiv. What anxious, doubting souls have been confirmed by such chapters as John iii. and vi. What sorrowful, suffering believers have been consoled by such chapters as John xiv. or Hebrew xii. How many a thought of repentance has been awokened by the example of the publican, smiting upon his breast and crying, God be merciful to me a sinner! In how many faith has been brought into exercise by the petitions, "Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief." "Lord increase our faith." In how many has there been a kindling of love to the Saviour by that touching word, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." In how many hope has been quickened by the remembrance that "there remaineth a rest for the

people of God." In how many evil tempers and passions have been restrained by the saying, "Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart." Many a wrong word has been left unspoken through the assurance that "for every idle word that men shall speak they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment." Many an unholy thought has been crushed by the Psalmist's declaration, "Thou understandest my thought afar off." Many a murmuring and impatient thought has been subdued by the prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane, "Nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done."

Prayers without end have been called forth by the record that Christ "went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God," and by the promise that "every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth;" and numberless praises have been offered through that song of joyful thankfulness, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name." In truth there is no sin but hath been overcome, there is no grace but hath been wrought or increased within the heart, by some precept, some promise, or some narrative of holy Scripture.

And if at all times it is needful to be well acquainted with the whole truth as revealed in Holy Scripture, it is doubly so when we find on all sides false doctrine leading many astray from the simplicity of the faith of Christ. Be assured there is no safety for the soul, none whatever, in these days of controversy, but for each one humbly to search, and deeply to ponder the Word written, and moreover to be fervent in perpetual prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Let us hear from the Homilies, which ought carefully to be studied by every member of our reformed Church, a just commendation of the blessed effects of the study of Scripture.

“ Let us diligently search for the well of life in the books of the New and Old Testament, and not run to the stinking puddles of men’s traditions, devised by men’s imagination, for our justification and salvation. For in Holy Scripture is fully contained what we ought to do, and what to eschew, what to believe, what to love, and what to look for at God’s hands at length.. . . And as the great clerk and godly preacher, St. John Chrysostom saith, whatsoever is required to salvation in man is fully contained in the

Scripture of God.....There is whatsoever is meet for all ages and for all degrees and sorts of men. These books therefore ought to be much in our hands, in our eyes, in our ears, in our mouths, but most of all, in our hearts.

"For the Scripture of God is the heavenly meat of our souls ; the hearing and keeping of it maketh us blessed, sanctifieth us, and maketh us holy ; it turneth our souls, it is a bright lantern to our feet ; it is a sure, steadfast and everlasting instrument of salvation ; it giveth wisdom to humble and lowly hearts ; it comforteth, maketh glad, cheereth, and cherisheth our conscience ; it is a more excellent jewel or treasure than any gold or precious stone ; it is more sweet than honey or honey-comb ; it is called the best part, which Mary did choose, for it hath in it everlasting comfort....This Word, whosoever is diligent to read, and in his heart to print that he readeth, the great affection to the transitory things of this world shall be minished in him, and the great desire of heavenly things that be therein promised of God, shall increase in him. And there is nothing that so much strengtheneth our faith and trust in God, that so much keepeth up innocency and pureness of the heart, and also of

outward godly life and conversation, as continual reading and meditation of God's Word."

But if you would profit in this blessed duty, take heed above all things of mere surface reading, a superficial glancing over the page of Scripture, being content with knowing just the letter of the Word; most deadly is the peril of this. It makes a person regard the Bible as the least interesting of books. It covers the eye of the soul with scales that shut out all the joy and light that God would have us receive.

If you would avoid this, dig deep, break up ground, look beneath and within. Illustrate the precepts by the histories of God's servants. Illustrate the warnings by the lives of the ungodly. Search out comparisons and contrasts. What is difficult try to explain by what is simple and clear. Make a commentary on the parables by getting hold of the truths they contain, and then putting side by side with them passages from the Epistles and elsewhere that have the same purpose. Strive to discover the principles that underlie the Levitical ordinances and God's dealings with the Jewish people, and then see how they may be applied to your own case, or to the circumstances of the present day.

Never be in a hurry when you take your book in hand. Do not imagine it is necessary to get through a long chapter when your time is limited. Calmly, quietly ponder what you read. "If you read once, twice, or thrice, and understand not, cease not so, but still continue reading, praying, asking of others, and seeking knocking, and at last the door shall be opened."

Thus will God send forth to you His light, His truth; thus will the Spirit discover to you mysteries only revealed to the humble soul; thus will you find the pearl of great price, and His full salvation, to enrich and save you for ever.

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto the Lord."

Oh, may these heavenly pages be
My ever dear delight;
And still new beauties may I see,
And still increasing light!

Divine Instructor, gracious Lord,
Be Thou for ever near!
Teach me to love Thy sacred Word,
And view my Saviour there.

XXIII.

Lobing Service.

She hath done what she could.—**MATTHEW** xiv. 8.

Not what custom demanded,—she went far beyond this; not what she would,—she would fain have done far more than she did: but “she hath done what she could:” that to which love prompted her, that which her means enabled her to accomplish.

But what did this woman do to draw forth such a commendation from the lips of Christ? It was Mary the sister of Lazarus, and in truest devotion she comes to honour the Master. In days past she has heard from His lips words that have reached her very heart. He hath bestowed upon her the one thing needful: He hath taught her to choose the good part that should never be taken from her: He hath given back to her from the grave the brother four days dead: how can she manifest as she would, all her deep gratitude

towards Him? But if she cannot do all she would, she will do something. She brings an alabaster box of ointment very precious, to the value of some nine pounds in our money. She then breaks the box, and pours the ointment upon His head. She takes of it too and with it she anoints His feet. Then she stoops down, and begins to wipe His feet with her hair. Her money, her hands, her hair,—all shall be employed to honour the Saviour to whom she had given the warmest affections of her heart.

Ah! but she would never thus have anointed Christ, unless first He had anointed her. In His mercy and goodness He had bestowed upon her the oil of His heavenly grace; He had endued her with the unction of the Holy Ghost; He had thus drawn her with the cords of His love, and now she hesitates not to bring as her offering the very best that she possesses.

Reader, would you, like this woman, bring to Christ a gift that He will accept, ask of Him the anointing which He gladly bestows; ask of Him the manifold grace of His blessed Spirit, to quicken, to sanctify, and to teach you.

And it was a delightful service in which Mary was engaged. It was a delight to the Saviour

to receive her service. It was a delight to herself to perform it. Perhaps never in her life before had she felt her whole soul so enraptured with love, joy, and peace, as at that blessed season. Years afterwards she would doubtless often remember it. When the Master was no longer seen on earth, when she no more knew Him after the flesh, but as her exalted Redeemer, her great Intercessor at the Father's right hand, how she must have looked back to that favoured hour in the house of Simon, and felt thankful that it had been put into her heart thus to honour Him.

And a three-fold benefit arose from this work of love. It anointed Christ for His burial. It was a step onward in preparation of that precious blood-shedding and descent into the grave, by which He overcame death and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. It likewise filled the house of Simon with its fragrant odour. Not one was there within that house, but reaped something of the benefit. And then a blessing came back to Mary herself. She carried away on her own hands and hair somewhat of that which she had bestowed on Jesus. And it is ever so. None can do service for Him, but the blessing spreads wide. It honours Christ, it

honours the Father. It has an effect on those around. It brings a reflex benefit into the bosom of the one who performs it.

Never forget that Holy Scripture tells of two means by which we may look to receive. They may seem very different, but they perfectly harmonize one with the other. The first way to receive, is by earnest, believing prayer : "Ask, and it shall be given you." But there is another way : free, cheerful, liberal giving. Side by side with the promise just quoted, we ought to place another word of our Lord's : "Give, and it shall be given unto you." Those that give, whatsoever it be, out of love to Christ shall never lose, but gain an infinite recompense from that which they impart. It may be here, or it may be hereafter; it may be in temporal things, or it may be in spiritual; but in whatever shape it come, the reward will far exceed that which hath been laid out. It shall be "good measure, pressed down and shaken together and running over," that shall be given into the bosom of the bountiful soul.

But how shall we follow Mary's example? Let us speak often to our hearts, with respect to our individual responsibility. Mary had her

talent, and she used it well. Let us do likewise. Five talents, two talents, or one, may have been committed to our charge. This hath God Himself determined in infinite wisdom. Our part is to employ well what we have, be it more or less. The unprofitable servant was not condemned because he had not five talents, but because having one he hid it in the ground. Be it your prayer continually,—“Lord, show me what gifts, what talents Thou hast granted to me, and then give me grace alway to occupy and trade with them diligently till Thou shalt come.”

Let us also remind ourselves often of the mighty power of individual effort, whether put forth for good or for ill. Proofs of this meet us continually on every side, and should stimulate us to a life of pains-taking and exertion in the cause of Christ. A few forcible words may set this before us, and the position which individuals occupy in subordination to the purposes of the Most High: “Truly one stands in awe at the might of single men, and at the world-shaping influence which they have exercised. It *is* a solemn, it *would* be a terrible thing to contemplate, if we did not believe that a mightier than man ruled over

all,—that these mightiest, no less than the least, were in His hand ; whether helpers or hinderers of His kingdom, were alike raised up by Him to work out His plans,—to bring about in the end, by strangest ways and such as to us seem often most unlikely, that kingdom which shall rule over all.”

But if God make so great a use of a single person, though it be an ungodly man, as for example He did of Senacherib, what an encouragement may this be to such as put themselves into His hands as instruments to fulfil His will !

“The noblest lot of man,” said Christopher Columbus, “is to be a conscious instrument in the hand of the Almighty for the fulfilment of His designs.” It is certain also that when God is pleased to make use of any one, or any effort, as His agency for extending His kingdom and doing good to man, the vastness of the blessing is altogether disproportionate to the means employed. Who shall say what Mary wrought for the Church of Christ by the example of her zeal and love in bringing her box of precious ointment ? Who shall say what liberality hath been called forth in every section of the Church by

the example of the widow bringing her two mites and casting them into the Lord's treasury? Who shall say how often a single sentence or expression dropped from the lips of some humble follower of Christ has been caught up, and has been re-echoed through many a congregation, and through many a town and village, awakening the careless or cheering the hearts of believers? Who shall say what fruit may spring from a little seed—a letter written to one in trouble, or a few minutes' conversation on the one thing needful?

A sister is just about to set sail for a distant land. She passes through a town where a brother is at school. She has only time in a few hurried moments to press upon him the importance of decision in religion, and to urge him to read the Scriptures daily, and pray for her and the heathen to whom she is going.

Behold, how great a harvest from one grain of seed! Through that interview, in years to come the brother becomes the laborious and successful schoolmaster of Masulipatam; and through his pupils, the influence of Robert Noble will long be felt far and wide throughout India.

But if we would follow Mary, let us remember

that she anointed both the head and feet of Christ. So should we do with His mystical body. Let us honour with our prayers and praises, with our love and adoration, our glorious and exalted Head. Neither let us forget the humblest members of His body. We may feed the poor, instruct the ignorant, comfort the sorrowful and downcast, gather together the little children, and send the Gospel to those sitting in heathen darkness.

And the fragrant odour that filled the house of Simon may also suggest its lesson. Why may not Christians, in the homes where they dwell, diffuse more of the fragrance of holy peace and heavenly love? Why not exercise more of that charity that suffereth long and is kind, that envieth not, that vaunteth not itself, that beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things? Instead of the coldness, indifference, jealousies, envies, estrangements, and the like, which so often mar the comfort of home-life, and brings such a reproach upon the name of Christ, might we not thus bring down into our dwellings something of the pure atmosphere of a better world? Christian reader, be careful that those who live beneath the same roof may

ot discern in you that unsubdued temper, that unchecked sin, that inconsistent walk that will neutralize all your influence for good.

“Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour, so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour.”

Why not cast out these “dead flies”? Selfish ways, angry feelings, thoughtless words, cross looks, peevishness, sullenness, ill judgings, refusals to be pleased or to accept acts of kindness, the neglect of little duties, attentions, and courtesies; a querulous, unhappy, dissatisfied way of speaking, putting questions in an unpleasant tone, or giving an answer that makes plain that you took a question in a wrong light, a looking awry at whatever is done by another, so that though it were an angel that did something would be sure to be amiss; keeping ear the truth and yet giving a wrong impression, ribing conscience by not going very far astray, and yet going far enough to make any one see that you are not striving to be perfect before God,—these are the “dead flies” that spoil the precious ointment, and place numberless stumbling blocks in the way of those dearest to us.

As you value your own peace of mind, yea, your own salvation and that of those about you, have done with these things for ever. In the might of the Spirit so watch and pray against them, so cultivate the graces of a loving charity and genuine sincerity, that men may discern in you the very opposite of all this, and may thus through you glorify your Father which is in heaven.

And it is quite possible that even from the sick chamber to which some reader may be confined, there may issue the sweet savour of Divine grace. When the rising murmur is stilled by some thought of Christ's suffering, when impatience and selfish brooding over personal trials are checked by the cheerful hopes that grace inspires, there comes forth a hallowing influence that cannot fail to be felt throughout the dwelling.

But there may be more than this. Let but the invalid have

“A heart at leisure from itself,
To soothe and sympathize,”

and opportunities will occur and ways be opened out for deeds of beneficence and Christian love, that will be all the more valued as coming from such a quarter.

The servants of the household may learn how assed is the hope that cheers the Christian, words of kindly counsel may be spoken, books at and perhaps read to those who come in, clothes made for the children of relations, or for the poor around, Christ's cause amongst the then not forgotten, and perhaps on the table at which reminds the visitor of its claims, d silently invites a contribution on its behalf, the messengers of peace, a letter indited if t written by the sick one, gifts to the needy, d Christian tracts and publications scattered round—something of this might be done by y Christian thus situated, and together with tercessory prayer might prove a means of in-lculable good.

And be not hindered in your service of Christ, hatever it be, by the unkind remarks that sometimes may reach your ear. Even in the very presence of Christ, envy assails Mary. The traitor Judas has an objection ready,—“Why was nt this ointment sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor?” It sounded fair and lausible so that the other disciples seem to have taken it up, but the root of it was secret enmity to Christ. The very man who objects to Mary

thus honouring Christ is the one who immediately afterwards sells Christ for thirty pieces of silver. Be not surprised therefore if you meet with the same thing. The real origin of ten thousand fair-sounding objections to missions at home and missions abroad, to this and the other scheme for advancing the kingdom of Christ, is a heart that is glued fast to the world, and that secretly hates all spiritual religion. There is a Judas-spirit lurking beneath, that cherishes no love to the Saviour, and for a very little gain or pleasure would say "good-bye" to Him for ever.

Never therefore give up a single good work, never turn aside for a single path of usefulness, because of the reproach that may be cast upon you. For remember, if man blames, Christ approves; Christ in this instance, as He ever does, takes the part of those who desire to serve Him. He puts down with one hand those that rebuke the woman, and with the other lifts her up by words of gracious commendation. "Let her alone. Leave her to accomplish her desire. What she doth shall never be forgotten. Throughout the wide world it shall be made known as the proof of the love she bears Me." "Verily I say unto

you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her."

Christian, never forget that Christ is the merciful Advocate and Rewarder of His people. Let the world shoot out its poisoned arrows, its sharp words, its hard sayings, yet never heed them. You have Christ on your side and that is enough. No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper. He pleads your cause now on His mediatorial throne; He will plead it in the presence of all when He shall appear. Think of that great day. How blessed shall you be then, if now, day by day, you are sowing the heavenly seed. What a glorious harvest shall you reap! What a harvest of answered prayers, of accepted labours, of efforts blessed! Not a sin, not a failing remembered, for the great Cross covers all: not the least act of service forgotten, for even "the cup of cold water shall in no wise lose its reward." "Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work."

Teach me to live ! 'Tis easier far to die—
Gently and silently to pass away—
On earth's long night to close the heavy eye,
And waken in the realms of glorious day.

Teach me to live !—Thy purpose to fulfil :
Bright for Thy glory let my taper shine !
Each day renew, re-mould this stubborn will :
Closer round *Thee* my heart's affections twine.

Teach me to live for self and sin no more ;
But use the time remaining to me yet,
Not mine own pleasure seeking, as before—
Wasting no precious hours in vain regret.

Teach me to live ! No idler let me be,
But in Thy service hand and heart employ ;
Prepared to do Thy bidding cheerfully—
Be this my highest and my holiest joy.

Teach me to live !—my daily cross to bear ;
Nor murmur though I bend beneath its load.
Only be with me. Let me feel Thee near :
Thy smile sheds gladness on the darkest road.

Teach me to live !—with kindly words for all—
Wearing no cold, repulsive brow of gloom ;
Waiting, with cheerful patience, till Thy call
Summons my spirit to her heavenly home.

XXIV.

Heavenly Guidance.

He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation.—PSALM cvii. 7.

A GENERAL officer ordered a division of his army to a certain spot. Without giving his reasons he counselled them as to the route they should take. The direct route was much shorter than the circuitous one pointed out, and the captain of the division ventured to take it contrary to the advice given him. After a while he discovered his mistake. The general had been wiser than himself. When last they had passed by that way the little stream in the way had been easily forded, but now the mountain torrents had so swollen its waters that it had become impassable, and the soldiers had consequently to retrace their steps and take the road originally pointed out to them.

Too often the Christian has something of the same experience. He has preferred to take his

own course rather than that pointed out to him by the Great Leader whom he professes to follow, and then disappointment follows, and at length he discovers how far wiser he would have been had he more implicitly relied upon the counsel which Christ by His word had given.

We have an example, and a very forcible one, of the danger of neglecting to seek guidance from above in the case of Joshua and the Gibeonites. When the latter sought peace with Israel, professing to come from far, the men hearkened to them, and took of their victuals and asked not counsel of the Lord. Hence they were deceived ; and in the reign of David a famine came upon Israel for three years, in consequence of this league with Gibeon, and Saul's treatment of them ; nor did the famine cease till seven of the sons of Saul were slain. Had but Joshua inquired of the Lord, all this evil, and much beside, would have been prevented.

And how many mistakes does the Christian make, and what a harvest of sorrow does he often reap, because he neglects to bring a matter before the Lord ere he enter upon it. Perhaps he yields himself to a growing attachment for one who is not of the same mind with him in

e highest matters ; or he enters upon a new sition without considering first its responsi-
ties ; he answers an important letter without reading it, like Hezekiah, before the Lord ; and en he finds that he cannot recede from the lse step once taken, but must take the conse-
ences as they come. Thus doth the Christian ten choose his own path, and finds, as an old writer has expressed it, that "children who carve r themselves are sure to cut their fingers."

But there is another way, and a yet more nful one, of doing the same thing. If it be rong to act without seeking direction from ove, it is still worse to despise the counsel at has been graciously given.

The remnant of Israel in the days of Jeremiah sought him to make supplication to the Lord s God, that He would show them the way herein they should walk, and the thing that ey should do. They promise likewise that hatever be the command, whether it be good or hether it be evil, they will obey the voice of e Lord their God. After ten days Jeremiah ings back to them a message, that they shall ide in the land, and then the Lord will be ith them, and save them from the hand of the

King of Babylon. The guidance vouchsafed is not according to the will of those who sought it; hence they refuse to believe the message, and determine to go down into Egypt. So the anger of the Lord is kindled against them, and He declares that those who go down thither shall die by the sword, the famine, and the pestilence. (See Jeremiah xlii. and xlivi.)

And is there not a parallel to this spirit in the conduct of many professed followers of Christ? They express a desire to be guided by the will of God. They ask that their way may be made plain before them, and in the reading of God's Word they find rules of conduct which they may apply to their own case. But then comes the difficulty. An enlightened conscience points in one direction, and self-interest or self-pleasing points in another. In the choice of a new home, in sending children to school or into the world, in visiting friends or receiving visitors, in drawing the line as to the recreation which we judge right,—in all this there is room for the exercise of Christian principle; and it is to be feared that too often it is sacrificed to mere expediency, or to that which is most in accordance with our natural tastes.

ut in denying self and walking in the path
ked out in God's Word, you may be assured
He who knows the end from the beginning
guide you aright, giving you a quiet peace
far outweighs any present advantage that
ht be found in a different course, and at
th making all that is painful work together
good.

Thy way, not mine, O Lord,
However dark it be !
Lead me by Thine own hand,
Choose out the path for me.

Smooth let it be or rough,
It will be still the best ;
Winding or straight, it matters not,
It leads me to Thy rest.

I dare not choose my lot ;
I would not, if I might :
Choose Thou for me, my God,
So shall I walk aright.

The kingdom that I seek
Is Thine: so let the way
That leads to it be Thine,
Else surely I shall stray.

In the 107th Psalm we have a picture of such
one exposed to the utmost peril and distress.

They are in an enemy's country. They are wandering hither and thither without guide or compass. They are lonely and desolate. They are fainting for lack of food and water. They are homeless, shelterless, having no city to dwell in. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble. He hears their cry and delivers them from their distress. He finds for them a path through the wilderness. He satisfies their hunger and thirst. He leads them step by step in His own way, and that the very best way. He brings them at last to a city where they may find a rest and a dwelling place.

"He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation."

Take this assurance, dear reader, as a prevailing argument with you to commit your way into the Lord's hand. You may at times be in the utmost distress and perplexity. Your way may seem hedged up on every side. Your difficulties may increase instead of becoming less, and your future may appear likely to be even darker than the present. Yet give not way to gloomy and despairing thoughts. Even if you have many fears as to your spiritual state yet the door is still open. Jesus is still ready to save. He rejects

not those who in faith cast themselves upon His mercy and love ; and if you truly come to Him, then, from that very moment, He undertakes to order your footsteps and direct your path. " Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding ; in all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct thy paths."

Possibly the difficulties of your position may have arisen through your own mistake, or thoughtlessness, or even sin. Yet when this is confessed, it does not the very least prevent our gracious God overruling it all for good, and bringing you safely through it. The solitary path that Jacob had to take when he left his father's tent arose from his own grievous sin of lying and deception ; and yet along that path God met him and assured him of His presence and care.

And when along your path you meet with trials little anticipated, when a turn in the road brings you away from the pleasant shade to the hot scorching plain, where you are exposed to the vehement heat of the sun, when sudden calamity comes upon you, yet doubt not that it is the right way. It is not the way you would

have chosen for yourself, but it is the way God hath chosen for you, and the Lord gently whispers in your hearing—"What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter."

A civilian with his young wife and three little children had just removed to a station in India far away from all other Europeans. The husband and wife had of late begun together to seek the Lord, when a sudden illness attacked the wife and in a few hours she breathed her last. Thus the sorrowing husband was left with the care of three young children, and none near to comfort or assist him in the charge of them. His faith was shaken, his footsteps well-nigh gone. Can this be the doing of a God of love? was the agonizing thought of his bereaved heart.

But for the deepest wound the Spirit can discover in the Word some healing balm. It was so in this case. The mourner turned to the book of Job. He found the passage where the patriarch spoke of his bitter complaint and his heavy stroke and then added,—“Will He plead against me with His great power? No: but He would put strength in me.” (xxiii. 6.)

It was enough. The message reached his heart. “God will not slay me,” he thought;

"He will not crush His afflicted servant, but He will console and support me by His mighty power." He looked for grace and help, and he was not disappointed.

And along your path, however rough it be, consider the end to which it leads. Far better the most rugged path if only it lead to the Heavenly City, than the easiest path that leads downward to darkness and despair. "We must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God." Yes, and there is rest after weariness, the companionship of the glorified after days of solitariness, the unveiled presence of Christ after hours when perhaps it seemed to us as if we were well-nigh forsaken.

Be then content with the Lord's own leading. Follow where He guides, and fear not. "I will bring the blind by a way that they know not ; I will lead them in paths that they have not known ; I will make darkness light before them, and crooked thing straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."

"Is this the way, my Father?" "'Tis, my child ;
Thou must pass through this tangled, dreary wild,
If thou would'st reach the city undefiled,—
Thy peaceful home above."

“But enemies are ‘round !” “Yes, child : I know
That where thou least expectest, thou’lt find a foe ;
But victor thou shalt prove o’er all below,—
Only seek strength above.”

“My father, it is dark !” “Child, take my hand :
Cling close to me : I’ll lead thee through the land.
Trust My all-seeing care : so shalt thou stand
‘Midst glory bright above.”

“My footsteps seem to slide !” “Child, only raise
Thine eye to Me ; then in those slippery ways
I will uphold thy goings : thou shalt praise
Me for each step above.”

“O Father, I am weary !” “Child, lean thy head
Upon My breast ; it was My love that spread
Thy rugged path : hope on, till I have said
‘Rest ! Rest for aye above.’ ”

XXV.

The True Worshippers.

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him.—JOHN iv. 23.

THE world is full of worshippers. Mammon, high rank, wealth, intellect, pleasure, the fashion of the day,—all these have their myriads of devotees. But there are vast multitudes also who worship Jehovah. Every Sabbath day we find in our own land large numbers who think it to be their bounden duty, as doubtless it is, to be found within the walls of some sanctuary set apart to the honour of God. But who amongst all these are acceptable in the sight of the Most High? Who are the true worshippers? Let us endeavour to answer this inquiry.

First, I would reply that true worshippers are heart-worshippers. The Samaritan woman asks of Christ the question where worship ought to be

offered. Shall it be in Jerusalem? Shall it be on Mount Gerizim? Christ would answer,—“Erect the temple, set up the altar within your own heart; neither because worship is offered here in this mountain or in Jerusalem shall it henceforth be accepted. God is a Spirit; He is the Father of the spirits of all flesh: He looketh on the inner frame and disposition of the heart, and only such as draw nigh to Him with earnest spiritual longings and desires, will He regard with favour and acceptance.”

Let the reader beware of making too much account of the circumstantials of Divine worship. It is very needful indeed that all things should be done decently and in order, and that nothing should hinder its due solemnity. Yet under every variety of outward form may there be offered up those holy prayers and praises, those humble confessions, and that joyful adoration which may reach the ears of the Lord of Sabbath.

There is no limit as to place. It may be within one of those magnificent cathedrals which still abide as monuments of the liberality of past ages; it may be within some battered cottage; it may be within the narrow confines of a chamber

where some sufferer has been long bearing a heavy cross of pain ; it may be within the room where a little handful of believers meet together in the Master's name.

There is no limit as to the form which the worship may take, so long as it be hearty and real. It may be in the beautiful Liturgy of our Church, so expressive of every want that the soul can feel ; it may be the simple utterance of a few broken sentences ; it may be a short prayer from holy Scripture ; it may be a sigh, a groan, a tear, a desire, a heart-look toward heaven. "Now Hannah, she spake in her heart ; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard." "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed ; I will sing and give praise." "Ye people, pour out your heart before Him." "Who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto Me ? saith the Lord."

To be content with any worship short of this, is to substitute base coin for real ; the shell and the husk for the kernel and the grain. It is moreover grievously to provoke and sin against the Searcher of hearts. And very painfully sometimes has this sin been brought to remembrance, when the conscience has been touched

by the finger of the Spirit. A few years ago, a man in middle life drew near to his end, after an illness of several months' duration. He passed not to his account without a good hope through grace, for his brother had earnestly prayed for his conversion, and in every way had sought his soul's peace; and God failed not to hear his prayer, and prosper his efforts. Yet there was one sin that weighed heavily upon the conscience of the dying man, and seemed at times almost to shut out the hope of mercy and salvation. What think you, reader, this sin was?—It was *formal worship in the house of God*. “I would sit there in church,” he would say, “as if I were worshipping God, whilst all the while my thoughts were full of business and the world. Oh, what a hypocrite, what a mocker of God have I been!”

But I would remark again, that the true worshipper is one that is penetrated through and through with a deep sense of his own demerits. It is to such the promise belongs: “The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.” “I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the

spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." And in whatever stage of the world's history he may have lived, do you not ever find this a marked characteristic of the child of God in his approach to the mercy seat? Do you not find Abraham confessing that he had "taken upon him to speak unto the Lord," and that he was but "dust and ashes"? Do you not find Jacob acknowledging that he was not "worthy of the least of all the mercies and the truth" that God had shown him? Do you not find David confessing that he had "gone astray like a lost sheep"? Do you not find Daniel, the man noted for his uprightness, refusing to plead his own righteousness, and confessing his own sin as well as that of his people? Do you not find the publican in the parable, the very type of the true worshipper, with deep self-loathing "smiting upon his breast, and crying, God be merciful to me a sinner"?

Be assured that if you would know the joy of true worship you must cultivate the same spirit. The repentance that brings you back to God must be followed all your life through by an ever deepening contrition of soul. The more you know of your own heart, the more you

know of the holiness of the law, the nearer you approach to the thrice holy Jehovah, the clearer will be your view of the evil and magnitude of your sin, and the deeper your humiliation in the remembrance of it. The Rev. Charles Simeon once stated that whilst for forty years he had never lost the assurance of forgiveness, yet that no tongue could describe how strongly he felt for himself the truth of the words in the general Confession,—“We have left undone the things that we ought to have done, and have done the things we ought not to have done, and there is no health in us.”

Again: the true worshipper is one who reckons worship a very important part of the business of life. It is that which in his sight stands very high in the position which it occupies. It is not that which may lightly be put aside or neglected for some temporal matter. It is that which merits all the pains and effort that he can bestow upon it.

The mere occasional worshipper,—the man who will now and then pay formal visits to the house of God,—the man who will give his hour or two on Sunday to join with the congregation assem-

bled together, but lives as a stranger to God the rest of the week,—such a one can expect no blessing from above. To walk with God, like Enoch ; to call upon God morning and evening and noon-day ; yea, seven times a day to praise Him, like David ; to continue in supplications and prayers night and day, like Anna in the temple ; to pray to God always, like the Centurion ; to pray always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit, as St. Paul bids the Ephesians do,—this is a very different matter. I forget not that in this day especially men have great calls on their time and attention ; that those in charge of little ones at home have incessant occupation : yet nevertheless, it is *possible*,—I say not *easy*,—in such cases and in every other to keep the fire ever burning upon the altar ; it is possible that a holy thread of worship may run through each day's labours and cares ; it is possible that there may be prayer on the Sabbath and on the weekday ; prayer in the family circle and in the secret chamber ; prayer in the midst of work and in the hour of recreation.

Let the Christian reader strive to watch for occasions that may draw forth some short petition or aspiration. If you pass by a church,

let it remind you of God's presence, and let a prayer ascend for the pastor and people who worship there. If you pass by a hospital, think of all the sufferers beneath its roof, and let a petition arise on their behalf. If you pass by a house where it is evident that death has lately entered, let it remind you that in the midst of life we are in death, and pray both for yourself and those bereaved : "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

The true worshipper, again, must worship God in the way that He Himself hath appointed. We may not choose our own way of approach, but must simply take the path which He hath marked out. There is need of remembering this. A new system of worship is arising amongst us. A deadly upas tree is springing up in our land, beneath whose pestilential shadow, as I verily believe, unless its growth be checked, all pure spiritual religion, all delight in Holy Scripture, all the joys and heavenly fruits of the free and glorious Gospel of the grace of God, will wither and fade and die.

The priestly system to which I refer raises

artificial barriers between the soul and God. It turns the eye of the soul from the great High Priest, ready to receive our confessions and prayers, to the earthly priest who professes himself able to absolve in Christ's name those that unburden their conscience to him. It turns away the eye from Him who is ever presenting His perfect sacrifice to the Father as the propitiation for our guilt, to the one who stands by an altar which man hath made, and there professes to represent that which Christ is doing above. Away with such a system as God never appointed, and which He will never bless! Away with all that stands between the sinner and the Saviour! Away with confessional and sacrifice and priest and altar here below, that all our thoughts may be centred on the true Confessional, the true Sacrifice, the true Priest, the true Altar. The way of worship that God hath appointed is by one everlasting Priest through the one quickening Spirit. It is to go straight to the throne of grace, knowing that we have there a most loving Father who welcomes to His presence the most unworthy who pleads the name and blood and merit of His well-beloved Son.

Nor let it be forgotten that he only is a true

worshipper whose daily life is an echo, a reflection of the prayers which he offers. Holy obedience and devout worship must ever go side by side. You cannot separate them. They are twin sisters, and so closely linked together that if one die the other cannot survive. A holy, watchful life proves the reality of our worship; worship is the strength, the main-spring of godly living. Believe me, nothing is more dangerous, nothing is more dishonouring to Him who calleth us to holiness, than making religious services, or a form of prayer, a kind of sop to conscience for worldliness or self-indulgence, or disobedience even to the least precept. Such worship is not pleasing to God, nay, it is branded with His curse. "The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is His delight."

Your cherished sin, your wilful disregard of His commands cries louder for judgment and for punishment than your prayers for mercy. The evil thing kept back will assuredly neutralize your utmost endeavours to draw nigh to God: and you will find neither comfort nor blessing in such a course. Hence, strive in the Lord's strength to cast away whatsoever impedes you.

In all things, small or great, be honest with God. Practice diligently those virtues and graces which you have sought on your knees. Maintain a constant warfare, even to death, with sin, sloth, and selfishness.

Lord, teach us this and every day,
To live more nearly as we pray.

But a question may naturally arise in many minds,—How is it possible that men can thus worship God? Have we not by nature a carnal mind, very ready to cleave to earth, very slow to rise above it? Doth not the inner spirit, fallen in Adam, turn from such spiritual worship of God, as the diseased eye turns from the light? It is perfectly true. Corrupt human nature never did and never will desire a life such as this. We must rise above nature, and seek for the aid of Divine grace. And have we not just the promise that we need within the compass of this fourth chapter of St. John? Go back to our Lord's conversation with the woman at the well. What a precious boon doth He offer to her, and the very one that we need if we would be true, spiritual worshippers. He promises to her living water, the grace of the Holy Spirit, to be within

her as a springing well, ever gushing forth in the life that is from above.

"Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again : but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst ; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

Here is the source of all true worship. It needs continual repetition that the grace of the Spirit alone can teach us rightly to pray. He alone can take away the carnal mind ; He alone can reveal to us the blessedness of communion with the Father and the Son ; He alone can make intercession within our hearts with groanings which cannot be uttered.

And it is well to be assured for our encouragement, that the Father delights in those that worship Him thus. "The Father *seeketh* such to worship Him." The more earnest the search, the greater the joy of finding. The pearl merchant going from shore to shore in search of goodly pearls rejoiceth greatly when he discovers the pearl of great price. The good Shepherd long seeking after the wanderer bringeth it home on his shoulders rejoicing. So the Father, ever seeking in city and town and village for such as

worship Him, delighteth greatly when He
meth them. He delighteth in their least utter-
s; He fulfils beyond all expectation their
ers and desires: at length He sets them
ngst the worshippers before His throne in
, amongst angels and archangels, amongst
spirits of just men made perfect, where with
r joy than ever before, they shall join in the
us of the universal Church: “Blessing and
our and glory and power be unto Him that
th on the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever
ever.”

The prayers and praises of the saints,
Like precious odours sweet,
Ascend, and spread a rich perfume
Around the mercy-seat.

When God inclines the heart to pray,
He hath an ear to hear;
To Him there's music in a groan,
And beauty in a tear.

The humble suppliant cannot fail
To have his wants supplied,
Since He for sinners intercedes
Who once for sinners died.

XXVI.

Preparedness for the Lord's Coming.

And now, little children, abide in Him ; that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.—1 JOHN ii. 28.

It is the part of true wisdom to look beforehand, and, as far as possible, to prepare for that which may happen. The traveller setting out on a long journey makes provision for its emergencies. The mariner, marking in the heaven the first signs of a threatening storm, takes in the sails and has the ship in readiness to meet it. The wise builder digs deep and lays the foundation of his house upon the rock ; for he thinks of the day when the floods shall arise and the winds shall beat against it. The king before he goes forth to the battle sits down first and considers whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand.

It is thus plainly our wisdom to anticipate

nd rightly to prepare for the great crisis in the orld's history, toward which all things are raidly hastening. For it is impossible to conceive at the present state shall continue beyond the mit which hath been set to it by Him who as yet ears with the world for the sake of those whom le is calling out of it for Himself. Is there not righteous Judge in heaven, and yet doth not iniquity prosper and oppression bear rule? Is ot this world fashioned to manifest the glory of s Creator, and yet is it not groaning beneath the vils that are perpetrated every day? Are not hose who strive patiently and faithfully to serve he Lord too often despised and neglected, whilst hose who live in open contempt of His authority re amongst the world's foremost heroes? Hence oth not even human reason assure us that all his is only permitted for awhile, and then shall ome the day when the Lord will openly mani- est His glory and take away the reproach of His eople?

And it is worth our notice that all the work which has been carried on by Apostles, Evangel- sts, pastors, teachers,—yea, by the instrumentality of the least of His servants, is in anticipation of His approach. As when He first came He

sent John the Baptist to prepare the way before Him ; so now, and ever since He ascended to the Father, hath He been sending forth His messengers, that when He shall next appear there may be found gathered out of all lands a glorious Church, made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. Every sermon that is preached, every lesson that is given to a flock of little ones, every word of counsel spoken to the sick, every book or tract sent forth to warn the sinner or for the instruction and nourishment of the Lord's people, looks onward to the time when the great Shepherd shall appear, and when he that soweth and He that reapeth shall rejoice together.

And it was the remembrance of this which led the Apostle John so tenderly to exhort those to whom he wrote his Epistle steadfastly to cleave to Christ. He would have them abide in Him, so that both he who had ministered to them, and they who had received his words, might together have confidence when the Lord appeared. " And now, little children, abide in Him ; that when He shall appear we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming."

Believers are addressed as "little children."

It is a term of endearment. It was often in the lips of Christ, and showed how tenderly He loved those that followed Him. And the Apostle shared his Master's spirit. Those dear to Christ were also very dear to him. It marks also the simplicity, the trustfulness, the humility, that ought to characterize Christ's disciple. "Whoso shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall not enter therein." It tells also of their helplessness. A little child needs perpetual care : even so doth the Christian need continually to rely upon the watchful care and the upholding hand of a faithful Saviour.

Hence comes the call—"Abide in Him." No other means of safety, no other hope of victory, no other source of strength can be discovered than this. To abide in Christ is everlasting life ; it is assured blessedness when He comes.

"Come unto Me!" "Abide in Me!" "Follow Me!" The substance of all duty and all safe walking is contained in these three directions, and they must not be separated one from the other.

Come unto Christ ! With all thy weariness, with all thy sin, with all thy fear come to Him : this is the first step.

Come unto Me : O precious word !
Jesus, I come to Thee ;
To Thee, my Saviour, Friend, and Lord,
I come, I run, I flee.

Follow Christ ! Walk ever as He walked !
Walk after Him in holiness, in self-denial, in
love, in communion with the Father ! Without
following Christ your religion is but an empty
name. He hath said, " If any man will serve
Me, let him follow Me ; and where I am, there
shall also My servant be."

But forget not the intermediate step. Abide
in Christ ! It is as needful as coming to Him at
first. Without it also there can be no possibility
of your following in His footsteps.

Abide in Him as the only ground of your ac-
ceptance. Never attempt to add any merits, any
worthiness, any graces of your own, to the per-
fect satisfaction He hath made for your sin, and
to that glorious righteousness in which class you
can appear before God. You stand perfectly
justified in Christ the very moment you truly
believe in Him ; and you must hold fast the
same confidence steadfast unto the end.

Abide in Him as the Fountain of all grace and
holiness. Cut off the branch from the stem of

the vine, and what can it do but wither and die ? What fruit, what clusters can it possibly bear ? Even so, without continual faith in Christ, without leaning upon His grace perpetually, it is impossible to grow in holiness, and to exhibit in your life the fruits of the Spirit.

Abide in Him as your strength in every labour of love. If you keep close to Him in the fellowship of the Spirit, He will make all grace abound toward you, that ye always having all sufficiency in all things may abound unto every good work. He will open your heart that you shall love the souls He died to save : He will open your lips to speak to others a word in season : He will open your hand bountifully to give of your substance for His cause.

What is meant by abiding in Jesus may be illustrated by the example of one who lately has been called to his rest, and who for a period of some sixty-four years endeavoured faithfully to serve Him. Early in life James Rock was much impressed by a sermon on the cleansing efficacy "of the precious blood of Christ ;" and beneath the shelter of that blood he lived and died. About the same period of his early life, one morning on his way to school he picked up a

gold ring. Taking it home, he :
on the inside the motto—"God
our inheritance." These words
words of the text above referred
him a guiding star; and thus he
both on the blood that cleanse
on a Father's providential care.

Amidst the many temptations
beset him when a young man he
kept from making shipwreck
spirit of prayer was to him a gre

For the last fifteen years of his life
he was totally blind. One morning he
great pain in the forehead and he
The Scripture portion for that day
am the Lord thy God, which
profit, which leadeth thee by
shouldest go." "Thou shalt gui
counsel, and afterwards receiv
Sweet and precious promises! In
last he was ever to read. From
sight failed and he could no longer
book he loved, but its cheering
sook him.

Often have I felt deeply moved
which he would speak to the young

experience, whilst striving to persuade them to follow Christ. With a countenance lighted up with genial benevolence, he would say, "I cannot look upward as you can to the heavens, and behold the light of the sun by day or the moon and stars by night; but," said he, striking his breast, "there shines here a still brighter light: even the light of God's love in the face of Jesus Christ."

I will add a few words written by him in the year 1858: "It is now fifty-five or fifty-six years ago that I heard the first sermon that made a deep impression on my mind: 'Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things.....but with the precious blood of Christ.' This seems to be laid at the foundation of all my spiritual experience, unto this present day. Blessed be God, it never left me, but is at this day even sweeter than when first I heard it, and will, I trust, be ever the crown of my rejoicing throughout eternity. May the Spirit of God enable me to bear a brighter evidence that the power of Christ resteth on me, for it is that alone which has preserved me all my life long.

"And here is my confidence for the time to come. Through this it is my privilege to say

God is my heavenly Father, who has provided for my spiritual as well as my temporal wants, in giving His dear Son to die for my soul's salvation, who thus became my Saviour and Redeemer ; and He has given me His Holy Spirit to reveal both the Father and Son to me, who with Himself is one Jehovah, who together in the eternal covenant of love engaged to save my immortal soul. For by grace we are saved through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the free gift of God, unmerited, undeserved. I feel at this time as much, yea more, dependent on God's providence and grace than I did when I heard the sermon of which I have spoken, or any time since. The more I can exercise simple faith in Him, the more comfort I enjoy in my soul ; taking the plain promises of God just as they stand, and believing them to mean what they say. This I find the only way of quenching the fiery darts of the Wicked One ; suppressing unbelieving or unhallowed thoughts, corrupt desires, or angry feelings. These precious promises used in faith and prayer are the weapons of my Christian warfare and will I trust continue to be, through Divine aid, to the end of my days ; when, if it be His holy will,

though 'a poor sinner and nothing at all,' I hope to sing 'Victory! Victory through the blood of the Lamb.'

Like this faithful servant of Christ, evermore abide in Him, and then you will await joyfully the day of His return. What a blessed hope shall it be to you! He comes as the Bridegroom of His Church, to perfect her bliss in His own presence for ever. Doth not the wife eagerly anticipate the return of her husband after a long voyage; pacing hither and thither along the sea-shore, to catch the first glimpse of the vessel which shall bring him back to her? And why shall not the faithful Christian, who day by day has worked for Christ, and prayed for His Church, and withstood the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the Devil,—why shall he not gladly welcome the Lord when He returns?

He shall have confidence and not be ashamed. True, he has often failed in his service, he can detect unnumbered sins in his every-day walk, but there is no condemnation, for all has been confessed and forgiven.

He shall not be ashamed, for Jesus will not be ashamed to confess His name before the Father; neither shall he be ashamed of that

which he has attempted to do in behalf of souls, for he shall see that his work has not been in vain in the Lord.

But shall none be ashamed at that day ? Yea, verily, for then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and many that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake to shame and everlasting contempt.

How shall the man be ashamed that hath set at nought the authority of the Word of God, and by his infidel objections hath caused many to fall !

How shall he be ashamed who hath often been exhorted to flee to Christ, and who yet hath chosen the path of the sinner !

How shall he be ashamed who hath trusted in his own righteousness and hath never put on the wedding garment !

How shall he be ashamed who hath professed the name of Christ, and yet all the while hath been a very Balaam or Judas ; a whitened sepulchre full of dead men's bones !

Reader, be faithful, be honest with yourself. What you are, what you have been, what your course has been from the beginning and what it is now, will assuredly be made manifest here-

after. Dare you contemplate it ? What would be your feelings if, in the presence of a large congregation, the minister of Christ were to stand up and read out the whole story of your life as it is known to God and your own conscience,—hiding nothing, extenuating nothing, revealing your most secret thoughts and motives? Could you fearlessly pass through such an ordeal ? If not, what will it be when that life is laid bare at the awful tribunal of the Great Day ? Is it not wiser to let that story be told to your Judge now, whilst He waits to be your Advocate, that He may take your part when He shall appear, and declare that He hath nailed your sins to His cross and taken them all away ?

But let the Christian pilgrim patiently tarry a while, trusting still, watching still, working still, suffering still,—and the shadows of night shall flee away, and the King shall come in His beauty. “Let your loins be girded about and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord, when He will return from the wedding ; that when He cometh and knocketh they may open unto Him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching.”

Be patient ! Life is very brief,
It passes quickly by ;
And if it prove a troubled scene
Beneath a starry sky,
It is but like the shaded night,
That brings a morn of radiance bright.

Be hopeful ! Cheerful faith will bring
A living joy to thee,
And make thy life a hymn of praise,
From doubt and murmur free ;
Whilst like a sunbeam thou wilt bless
And bring to others happiness.

Be earnest ! An immortal soul
Should be a worker true ;
Employ thy talents for thy God,
And ever keep in view
The judgment scene,—the last great day,
When heaven and earth shall pass away.

Be prayerful ! Ask, and thou wilt have
Strength equal to thy day :
Prayer clasps the Hand that guides the world ;
O make it then thy stay ;
Ask largely, and thy God will be
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